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ISSUE 461 | 28 OCT – 10 NOV 2015

Your friendly guide to technology

If you understand this, you *don't* understand this p49

WINDOWS UPDATES Do You *Really* Need Them?

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From the Editor

When I consider the impact of Windows 10's first 100 days, one fact leaps out: by early October it had been downloaded on to 110 million PCs worldwide. That's a lot of people testing new tools, trying to fix problems, and attempting to make Cortana understand them (Stuart Andrews has given up – see page 74).

Yes, Windows 10 is free. But Microsoft still had to persuade people to download a new operating system, a process that intimidates many. Microsoft ultimately wants 1 billion devices, including phones, to run Windows 10, so there's a long way to go. Yet I feel we can already hail the 'free' experiment a success.

Questions remain, of course. Will more hidden costs emerge? Is Microsoft stealing too much of your data? How good will the updates be? We look at these in our Cover Feature, which assesses the first 100 days and looks forward to what comes next. It's a must-read for both Windows 10 users, and those still unsure whether to upgrade.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

£290
Price of our favourite new Android tablet – *p27*

1603
Google Earth error message we fix – *p40*

35%
Proportion of second-hand phones containing previous owners' data – *p16*

HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

Contents

28 Oct – 10 Nov 2015 • Issue 461

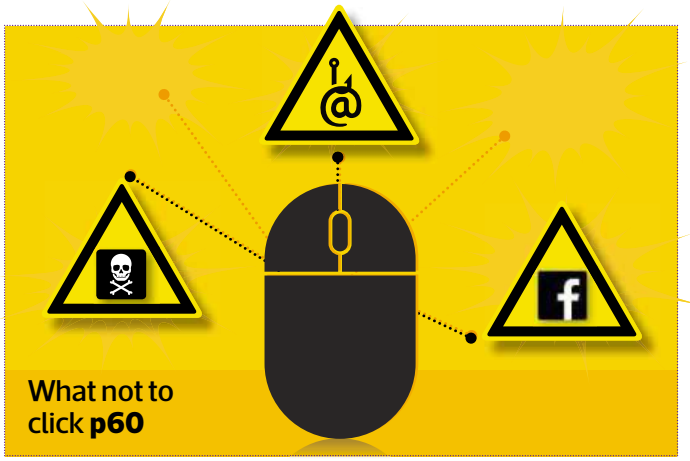
In this issue...

50 Windows 10: the first 100 days
Three months on from its launch we review the good, the bad and the ugly of Microsoft's operating system

57 Add patch power to your antivirus
Why Windows Updates are more important than ever

58 Don't pay for Office 2016
Save yourself money with free alternatives to Microsoft's suite

60 What you must never click
Thwart the efforts of hackers with our phishing survival guide



In every issue...

6 News

11 Question of the Fortnight
Should the NHS treat online porn addiction?

12 Letters

14 Consumeractive

16 Protect Your Tech

18 Best Free Software
RedNotebook

30 Buy It!

33 Competition
Win a Gramofon Wi-Fi music player

49 What's All the Fuss About?
Quantum computing

64 Problems Solved

69 Fast Fixes Avast

73 Jargon Buster

74 The Final Straw
Stuart Andrews feels much misunderstood by Cortana

Subscribe NOW!
See page 62 for our special subs offer

Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 8.0 **p27**

Apple iPhone 6s **p24**

Amazon Fire tablets (2015) **p20**

Reviews

20 Amazon Fire tablets (2015)
Our round-up of Amazon's latest Fire tablets leaves us lukewarm

22 Vibox Exile
An all-round PC with futuristic stylings

23 Acer Aspire Switch 11 V
Acer's hybrid aims to to rival Microsoft's Surface 3

24 Apple iPhone 6s
Simply the best smartphone around

26 Sony Xperia Z3+
Sony's phablet is impressive – but *so* last year

27 Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 8.0
Samsung's tablet takes on the iPad mini 4 – and almost pulls it off

28 Google Chromecast Audio
Make your hi-fi system wireless

Pro-Ject Elemental Phono USB
A quality turntable for your vinyl

29 Canon CanoScan LiDE 220
A decent scanner that won't multi-task

Workshops & Tips

14 pages of brilliant workshops and expert tips

35 Control CCleaner from the web

38 Add tabs to Windows Explorer

40 Make Google Earth work in Windows 10

42 Find out what's crashing your PC

43 Readers' Tips
Use Dropbox within Gmail

44 Phone and Tablet Tips
Call someone using Google Now

46 Make Windows Better
Hide a folder on your PC

47 Make Office Better
Rearrange text and images in slides

48 Secret Tips For...
NirLauncher

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Bank-robbing botnet taken down by UK and US police

British police in the National Crime Agency (NCA) have worked with the FBI to smash an eastern European gang that stole £20m from UK bank accounts using powerful malware.

Worldwide it's estimated that the Dridex botnet has stolen $100m (£65m).

Investigators believe it was being operated by a criminal network based in Moldova, headed up by 30-year-old Andrey Ghinkul. He was arrested in Cyprus in August, although the news wasn't announced until October.

The FBI wants to extradite him to the US to face charges of criminal conspiracy, unauthorised computer access with intent to defraud, damaging a computer, wire fraud and bank fraud.

The two law-enforcement agencies took control of the botnet using a technique called 'sink-holing'. Computers infected with Dridex will remain so, but they will now send bank-account data to servers run by the FBI and the NCA rather than to those managed by the criminal gang.

Dridex attacks a PC whenever its owner opens an infected Word document sent in an email. A macro inside the document downloads the malware, which in turn installs components that connect the PC to the botnet. The criminals can then steal bank-account details, letting them withdraw money from victims' accounts.

The NCA described Dridex as a "particularly virulent" malware, adding that it has infected "thousands" of Windows PCs in Britain – although most of the money has been stolen from small businesses.

But will your case be investigated?

Anyone who thinks they've lost money to Dridex has been advised to contact Action Fraud (www.actionfraud.police.uk/contact-us) and notify their bank.

However, the effectiveness of Action Fraud was recently questioned after it was revealed that UK police investigate only one in 100 cases of online fraud (see 'Question of the Fortnight', Issue 460).

Action Fraud, which is run by the Home Office in association with City of London police, uses a computer program to assess whether a case is worth following up. This means thousands of cases are not investigated.

Its website tells anyone reporting a crime that they will be contacted by the police only 'in some cases', and that the police 'cannot investigate every report individually'.

Research by *The Times* newspaper found that there have been only 9,000 convictions for online fraud in the past year, despite millions of cases being reported by the public.

COMMENT

When we said in Issue 460's Cover Feature that 2015 was proving to be the worst year ever for malware, we weren't exaggerating. Phishing attacks by criminal gangs are becoming ever more sophisticated, and the malware planted on PCs ever more deadly. Cybercrime on this scale requires an international response, so it's pleasing to see such effective cooperation between the FBI and NCA. But the words 'tip' and 'iceberg' spring to mind. There will surely be many more Dridex-style attacks in future, as more criminals discover that they don't need a sawn-off shotgun and balaclava to rob a bank.

ALMOST HALF OF CRIME NOW ONLINE

Online fraud and malware attacks have been added to the overall crime figures for the first time, and they account for 44 per cent of its total. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said that in the 12 months to June 2015 there were 5.1m incidents of cybercrime, affecting 3.8m people in the UK. That compares with 6.5 million incidents of offline crime. Excluding cybercrime, the general rate is down 8 per cent.

☺ ***You'll like this...*** You can now use Skype without an account or installing software (www.snipca.com/18300)

☹ ***...but not this*** Scammers are conning people into buying fake products that 'block' nuisance calls (www.snipca.com/18337)

Microsoft: you *will* upgrade to Windows 10 – like it or not

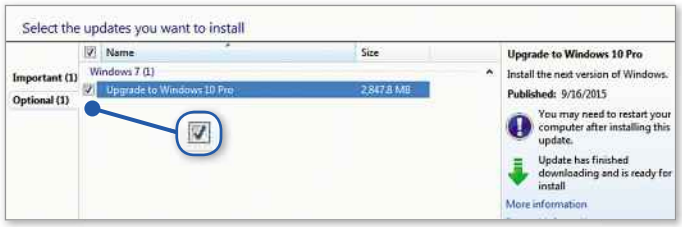
Microsoft has angered many Windows users by making it harder to opt out of Windows 10 upgrades.

Since the operating system launched on 29 July, Microsoft has intensified its efforts to persuade people to upgrade.

It has already come under fire for downloading 6GB of Windows 10 files on to Windows 7 and 8 PCs, even when users hadn't requested them (see 'Question of the Fortnight', Issue 459).

Now Windows 7 and 8 users are reporting that a countdown to Windows 10 installation automatically appears on their PC's Desktop. There are two boxes beneath the countdown, giving the options to upgrade now or reschedule. There is no option to cancel the upgrade.

Some Windows 7 and 8 users have even told *Computeractive* that they no longer see an option in their



Control Panel to install updates to their version of Windows. Instead, they see a message that says the upgrade to Windows 10 is "ready". It urges the user to restart their PC so installation can begin.

Reader John Hale told us that Microsoft was "completely out of order". He wrote: "I do not want to lose the excellent Windows 7 on my current computers and object most strongly to Microsoft trying to force me to do so".

Mr Hale said that the 'upgrade to Windows 10' option was pre-ticked (see screenshot). He unticked it and right-clicked to hide the update, but it reappeared the next time he checked for updates. Disabling these notifications doesn't seem possible at the moment.

Even the person who developed software preventing previous Windows 10 alerts from appearing says there's no way of stopping the new messages. Josh Mayfield, the maker of the GWX Control Panel (www.snipca.com/18314), wrote: "I am looking into whether it's possible to fix these things through software. I do not have any recommendations at the moment, though, unfortunately".

Daily Mail adverts 'contained ransomware'

Visitors to the *Daily Mail* website (www.dailymail.co.uk) were exposed to adverts that contained ransomware.

The claim was made in a blog post by security researchers at Malwarebytes (www.snipca.com/18317).

It said that Mail Online, one of the world's most visited news websites, briefly contained fake adverts for shoes. Clicking the advert installed ransomware that encrypts files on the victim's PC and demands a fee to unlock them. It infects PCs by exploiting vulnerabilities in Internet Explorer and Flash.

Three days after Malwarebytes told the Mail about the adverts, the newspaper replied to say they had been removed.

Hackers are increasingly trying to hack PCs using bogus adverts, a practice known as 'malvertising' (see Protect Your Tech, Issue 458).

In September, researchers at California-based security company Cyphort said that incidences of malvertising had risen by 325 per cent between June 2014 and February 2015.

One of the biggest attacks happened in June and July when infected adverts appeared on Yahoo's websites for a week.

One of the reasons malvertising is such a serious threat is because some attacks don't require you to click the advert – they can infect your PC merely by being displayed on the website you're visiting.

Using an ad-blocking browser extension, such as Adblock Plus (https://adblockplus.org), will help because it removes malicious as well as safe adverts. At the time of writing the Mail Online hadn't commented on the claim.

IN BRIEF

MICROSOFT RELEASES IE SECURITY FIX

All Internet Explorer users have been urged to make sure they are running the latest version after Microsoft issued several 'critical' fixes for the browser. The security updates apply to IE on all supported versions of Windows (from Vista to 10). Your version of IE would have been automatically updated if you have that option enabled – find out at www.snipca.com/18302. You'll find more information on the fixes in Microsoft's Security Bulletin for October: www.snipca.com/18301.

YAHOO MAIL APP 'KILLS' PASSWORDS

Yahoo has relaunched its email phone app that lets you sign into your account without a password. Now, when you sign in, you'll receive a notification from Yahoo asking if you're trying to log in. Tap yes, and you'll enter your account. Yahoo claims this is safer and more convenient than using a password. Visit www.snipca.com/18299 for more details, plus details of new tools.

Tomorrow's world

Here's the good news: Panasonic has built a robot, called the Laundroid, that washes, dries and folds your clothes, thereby eliminating one of life's most tedious chores. The bad news is that folding a T-shirt takes five minutes, by which time you could have folded half your wardrobe. Watch it in action at a recent Japanese technology show: www.snipca.com/18273.

IN BRIEF

UPDATE FLASH, READER AND ACROBAT

Adobe has released 69 security fixes for flaws in its Flash, Reader and Acrobat tools. They are rated 'critical' because hackers would be able to exploit the flaws to take control of a victim's PC. The updates should have been automatically applied – you should check that you have the latest version at www.snipca.com/18270 (Flash) and www.snipca.com/18271 (Acrobat, Reader).

GET WI-FI FROM THE PAVEMENT

Chesham in Buckinghamshire has become the first UK town to have a pavement that has been specially built to provide Wi-Fi access. Chiltern District Council has teamed up with Virgin Media to trial the 'smart' pavement on Chesham's high street. They claim shoppers, residents and businesses will be able to get speeds of up to 166Mbps.

AVG says there's nothing wrong with selling your private data

AVG has defended its controversial new privacy policy of collecting and selling information about what people using its software do online.

The security company's new policy, announced in September, says that AVG will "collect non-personal data to make money from our free offerings so we can keep them free" (see News, Issue 459).

This allows it to sell data such as your search and browsing history, and which Internet Service Provider you use. Companies can use this information to show you adverts based on your interests.

AVG said it wanted to be transparent about how it operates, but the move was heavily criticised by independent security experts. They accused AVG of compromising users' privacy, and undermining public trust in security firms.

Despite these concerns, AVG has stuck with the policy, introducing it on 15 October. Talking to the website The Register, AVG's senior security evangelist Tony Anscombe said: "We've published a simpler policy that even someone's Mum can understand".

Anscombe tried to placate worried users by saying that AVG would "cleanse" data before selling it to advertisers, making it anonymous.

But security experts have questioned why companies would want to buy 'anonymised' data.

Respected security expert Graham Cluley said: "Let's not kid ourselves, advertisers aren't interested in data which can't help them target you". He claimed such data "wouldn't have any value" to advertisers.

Cluley also stressed how difficult it is to anonymise data so it can't be retrieved. Researchers at Harvard University have recently demonstrated how supposedly private healthcare data can be 'de-anonymised' to identify patients.

Anscombe said that AVG is "keeping a close watch" on this area of research and will factor it into how data is anonymised. He also added that users will be able to turn off the data-sharing feature.

You can read AVG's new privacy policy at www.snipca.com/17993.

• **Switch from AVG to Avast – we show you how in our next issue**

The USB that instantly kills your PC

It may look like a normal USB stick, but this device can kill your PC in seconds.

USB Killer 2.0 was made by a Russian security expert who calls himself Dark Purple. In a video that has been watched by millions worldwide (www.snipca.com/18274), he demonstrates how plugging in the stick 'fries' a laptop's motherboard.

Within seconds the laptop's screen goes blank, following a short 'frazzling' sound.

The stick works by drawing a small amount of power from the connected computer, then storing it in an internal capacitor. When this reaches 220 volts it is sent back into the computer through the USB port. This power surge destroys components inside the PC.

In a blog post (in Russian: www.snipca.com/18275), Dark Purple tells readers not to worry about the laptop - a Lenovo Thinkpad X60 - because he bought it just to be destroyed. He said that data on the hard drive would probably survive the attack.

The stick is Dark Purple's second version of USB Killer. The original, demonstrated in March, administered 110 volts.

While there's no suggestion Dark Purple will use USB Killer for criminal purposes, his video is a startling reminder that you should never plug unfamiliar sticks into your computer.

The world's gone mad!

Google has succumbed to political correctness in the US by renaming the suffix of its new file-compressing software Brotli. It initially called it '.bro', but was warned that feminists use the term to describe sexist behaviour in American colleges, and would therefore find it offensive. The software, which make web pages load faster, will now have the suffix '.br'. Google said this was a satisfying compromise.

Update your router now! Netgear releases urgent security fix

Netgear has released a firmware update for its routers to fix a flaw that hackers had exploited.

The company admitted that the vulnerability is "serious", but claimed it affected fewer than 5,000 devices.

However, one security company, the Swiss-based Compass Security, said it told Netgear about the flaw back in July. Compass Security's Alexandre Herzog said that more than 10,000 routers had already been exploited, suggesting that Netgear was underestimating the impact of the vulnerability.

Another company, Spanish firm Shellshock Labs, said it informed Netgear at the end of September.

The flaw gained more publicity on 9 October when the BBC spoke to US security researcher Joe Giron about the risks. A few days later Netgear released the fix.

Giron said that he became aware of the flaw after noticing that hackers had changed the administration settings on his router. This allowed them to steal data about what he had done online. They could also have redirected him to malicious websites.

Netgear said that it will prompt people to update their router when they log into their router's admin settings. Anyone with Netgear's Genie app on their PC, phone or tablet will also be notified.

Not all Netgear routers are at risk. To see if yours is, visit the company's Support page (www.snipca.com/18225), which lists the vulnerable routers at the top.

Click the blue link on the page to download the firmware. If you have trouble, contact Netgear's support team: www.snipca.com/18227.

As we reported in Issue 454 (page 60), hackers are increasingly targeting routers because antivirus software doesn't typically protect these devices.

An effective way to check your router's safety is to use the free Router Checker tool from security company F-Secure (www.snipca.com/18229).

Firefox removes all plug-ins but Flash

Mozilla has taken the surprise decision to keep supporting Adobe Flash in its Firefox browser, despite saying it will remove other plug-ins.

Flash is widely regarded as one of the most unsafe tools you can download to your PC because hackers often exploit its security flaws to carry out attacks.

However, it's still used by many popular websites. The BBC iPlayer, for example, relies on it, although there is a non-Flash beta version now available (www.bbc.co.uk/html5).

The reprieve for Flash is all the more surprising given that Firefox temporarily blocked it in July. But in a blog post (www.snipca.com/18220) Mozilla said it will continue support for the plug-in because it is "still a common part of the web experience for most users".

The company will now work with Adobe to boost Flash's stability, performance and security.

Firefox will stop supporting most other plug-ins, including Java and Microsoft's Silverlight, by the end of 2016. Mozilla says that they are no longer required because the ability to play videos and display graphics is now built into many websites.

This should make browsing the web a smoother experience because you won't have to download plug-ins to play content.

Mozilla also said that as well as making Firefox safer, removing plug-ins will mean the browser will be faster and less prone to crashing.

Google is also in the process of removing plug-ins from Chrome, a decision it made in November 2014 (read its blog at www.snipca.com/18223).

IN BRIEF

BUY HOMEMADE ITEMS ON AMAZON

Amazon has launched an online store selling handmade goods to rival the likes of Etsy (www.etsy.com). Called 'Handmade at Amazon' (www.snipca.com/18214), it currently sells 80,000 products made by "artisans" in more than 60 countries, including the UK. Items available to buy include furniture, jewellery, stationery and bedding.

HACKER WATCHED PEOPLE HAVING SEX

A hacker who used malware to spy on people via their webcams has been given a 40-week suspended sentence and placed on the sex offenders' register for seven years. Stefan Rigo, 33 from Leeds, pleaded guilty to one count of voyeurism and also admitted offences under the Computer Misuse Act. The police found images on Rigo's computer of people performing sexual acts while on Skype. The National Crime Agency said that Rigo knew around half of his victims.

NASA APOLLO PHOTO ARCHIVE NOW ONLINE

Almost 14,000 photos taken during Nasa's missions to the Moon are now available in a new Flickr album (www.snipca.com/18216). Every photo has been digitised in high resolution to enhance how they look on modern PC monitors. The archive contains every photo taken on the Moon, plus hundreds of life on board the rockets.

Named & Shamed

Jane Hoskyn puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software stuffed with junk

WARNING: Junk ahead

Junk offender: Cnet

"I'll devote this whole page to Cnet one day," I said in Issue 454, after laying into the site's PUP-stuffed installer for Free YouTube Downloader (www.snipca.com/18361). Here we are, then. Not quite a whole page, but I'm sure I'll make up for that by mentioning it again soon.

Cnet vs Download.com

Cnet itself (www.cnet.com) is not malicious. It's just another technology news site that likes gadgets and games. The problem is its 'freeware' site, Download.com (http://download.cnet.com) – of which, oddly, there's no mention on the Cnet news site. Maybe they're embarrassed by it.

Dowload.com is so bad that software makers beg you not to download their tools from it. The site for free tool Attribute Changer (www.snipca.com/18362, see Best Free Software, Issue 456) says: "Important information: Do NOT download Attribute Changer from CNET/Download.com". Cnet's installer for Attribute Changer includes adware; the site's own installer does not.

What makes this so shocking is that the developer hasn't been able to prevent Cnet bundling rubbish with the tool. This can do terrible damage to their reputation, as well as to your PC.

Watch out, adware about

PUP-makers pay Cnet to have their wares bundled into the installers of other programs. This is obviously a form of advertising – hence 'adware'. In many cases adware installs itself even when you opt out during installation. This was my experience with Free YouTube Downloader. For more users' experiences, in less polite language, see the site Reddit (www.snipca.com/18366).

I plead guilty to using Download.com recently to get the brilliant free photo viewer IrfanView (www.irfanview.com).

Free tool Attribute Changer begs you not to download it from Cnet

The installer contained numerous extras that I had to untick.

I only took this risk because IrfanView doesn't have its own installer. Where possible, always download free software using the developer's own installer (as with Attribute Changer). Open-source programs tend to host their installers on SourceForge, which isn't without its problems (see this page in Issue 451), but I've never had a problem with it – the same certainly can't be said for Cnet.

What *are* they talking about?

What they say

EMC (www.snipca.com/18364):

"The transaction brings together strong capabilities in digital transformation, software-defined data center, hybrid cloud, converged infrastructure, mobile and security... servers, storage, virtualization and PCs."

What they mean

EMC is really good at storage and security, and Dell is really good at making PCs, and now they're merging. Probably (www.snipca.com/18365).

Jane's villain of the fortnight

John Does

That's not the opposite of "John Doesn't". It's "John Doe" multiplied by 1,114 – every single one of them up in court for selling fake Amazon reviews.

The assorted anonymous defendants are being sued by Amazon for selling bogus reviews for $5 (£3.25) a pop – that's just the starting price – via small-traders' website Fiverr (www.fiverr.com).

The fake reviews are lazy nonsense ("This has lit up my life" about a USB cable), but they're worth their weight in Kindle Fires to the Amazon sellers who paid for them, because potential buyers believe them – and then buy the sellers' rubbish.

As an overly trusting type with a spare room full of stuff I wish I'd never bought, I'm behind Amazon's bid to "protect its customers from misconduct" (www.snipca.com/18367).

Want to nominate a villain of the fortnight? Email us at editor@computeractive.co.uk

Question of the Fortnight

Should the NHS treat online porn addiction?

Patients groups tell the cash-strapped NHS not to 'waste money'

The NHS has come under fire for spending money on treatments for several internet addictions, including watching online porn.

It was criticised after the *Daily Mirror* revealed that there are 100 patients being treated at the Centre for Compulsive and Addictive Behaviours in Fulham. Thirty-nine of the patients are hooked on web porn, while others are being treated for addictions to shopping and playing games online. The problem of porn addiction is so widespread that there is a waiting list for patients to be admitted to the clinic.

Doctors insist that over-using the internet should be treated as seriously as addictions to drink, drugs and gambling because the effect on people's lives can be just as devastating.

> "If people watch a bit of porn from time to time, then so what?"

But campaign group Patient Concern (http://patientconcern.org) expressed doubts that treating such addictions is a wise use of NHS funds, especially at a time when the service's budget is £930m in the red. Roger Goss, the group's co-director, said: "The onus is on the NHS to make sure they are treating people where they think the risks are very serious and not to waste their money on this".

He added: "If people watch a bit of porn from time to time, then so what?"

Many people are likely to agree with Goss given the unhealthy state of the NHS's finances. A damning report from the NHS regulator Monitor recently said that the service is in "its worst financial position in a generation". It suggested that the deficit among NHS trusts could hit £2bn for the financial year 2015 to 2016.

But doctors say that NHS funds should be spent at the early stages of addiction, to prevent massive costs later when a patient's condition has deteriorated.

Some MPs agree, including Labour's Grahame Morris who has served on the Health Select Committee. He said that despite "unprecedented financial pressures" on the NHS, it makes sense to tackle the kind of web addictions that can "lead to anti-social behaviour, social exclusion and even serious mental health problems later".

He warned that ignoring these addictions is a "false economy" because, long term, it puts more pressure on hospitals and public services.

Many leading medical figures agree. Author and psychotherapist Lucy Beresford (http://lucyberesford.co.uk) said she "would have no issue" with internet addiction being treated on the NHS.

She pointed out that some of the addictions, such as compulsively playing games, are the result of "generational" changes in lifestyle.

"People have far more access to these sort of games now," she said. "Many years ago you had to go to seaside resorts and into amusement arcades. Now they are available on everyone's screens."

Beresford acknowledges that gaming is "harmless" in most cases, but becomes a problem when people play games to "self-soothe difficult moods or cope with situations".

Central to the debate is where personal responsibility begins and ends. There's widespread agreement in medical circles that addiction is an illness that requires treatment. But many people feel that some addictions, such as online porn, are excessive lifestyle choices, and patients should therefore pay for their treatment. The argument will grow more intense if the NHS's financial crisis continues.

THE FACTS

- Thirty-nine patients at the Centre for Compulsive and Addictive Behaviours are hooked on internet porn
- The clinic treats other internet addictions, including obsessively playing computer games
- The NHS currently has a budget deficit of £930m

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind
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www.twitter.com/computeractive

Windows 10 is 'unforgivably unstable'

I've read in your magazine the ongoing debate about Windows 10. Although it has been only a few days since I successfully downloaded the operating system, I've already reached the conclusion that it's no better than Windows 7.

While it's true that anything new has teething problems, I'm surprised at how unstable Windows 10 is. Let me give you an example. Yesterday, I wanted to run my antivirus program. But because the power was low on my PC, Windows 10 switched the computer off without finishing the scan. When I then tried to switch it on again, I was met with a blank screen. This happened four times.

I may sound like a bit of a *Daily Telegraph* reader, saying that "things were so much better in my day", but this would not have happened with Windows 7. It would have scanned the system for the error, and would have switched everything back on.

Some mistakes in Windows 10 can be forgiven because it's still only two months old. But something like instability cannot. This seems to me a real problem, which Microsoft should have dealt with before Windows 10 came out.

Marek Wesolowski

Dismissing Windows 7 makes you a 'tech snob'

Gareth Watson is right to say that a lot of popular things are rubbish, such as mainstream TV shows and films (Letters, Issue 460). I can't see the appeal of James Bond films, or most of the dross on Saturday-night TV. Maybe Mr Watson agrees with me. But it takes a strange leap of logic to think that *everything* that's popular is rubbish. Dismissing Windows 7 for still being popular worldwide makes him sound like a technology snob. OK, so he knows more about computing "than the average person", but he doesn't need to demonstrate that by abandoning Windows 7. He can show off his superior expertise by continuing to use it, but doing so more smartly than most people.

He almost seems to be implying that Windows 7 users don't know what's good for them. Well, as a long-term Windows 7 user, I'm perfectly happy sticking with it – as millions of other people are. We just want an operating system that works. It's irrelevant whether it's the latest one or not. If it's also the most popular one, all well and good, but it's not important.

Thomas Ablett

GPs embrace tech? They work hard enough already

I have a number of acquaintances who are doctors, many of them GPs. None of these people entered their profession for financial gain. They did so because they wanted to help people. In recent years I've watched their mounting stress levels caused by increased workloads. I was therefore extremely annoyed to see the comments of Edward Pike in Letters, Issue 459 ('Make GPs work harder to embrace tech').

Let me tell you about one GP I know well. She is a partner working so-called 'three-quarter time' in a busy practice, and is married with two young children. This equates to an average of around 54 hours per week. She makes on average 60 consultations a day, and three or four house calls. In addition, she has to write referral letters, arrange hospital appointments, chase up laboratory results and notify patients of hospital decisions. She is often working by secure computer link at home after her children have gone to bed. A few hours a day of

additional work are fine if those hours exist. For GPs at present they are just not there.

Computeractive has often discussed political matters, and I enjoy following the threads of informed discussion. I would be disappointed if this ceased. I feel the debate about putting medical data on phones is a relevant one, especially relating to what data should be saved, and how safe it would be. However, such discussion should be based on constructive criticism rather than misinformed and inaccurate outbursts such as that of Mr Pike.

David Vawer

Parents upload too many photos of kids to Facebook

Surely nobody is surprised that paedophiles steal photos of children from Facebook (News, 460). In my experience on the site, every parent (and even some grandparents) spends half their waking hours uploading photos

Nokia phones: small but perfectly formed

Arise, Sir Stuart Andrews. I hope the Queen won't mind my knighting him, but he deserves it for exposing the ridiculousness of so much modern technology. Yet again he got it spot on in Issue 460 by lamenting the current trend for massive gadgets – especially phones.

Personally, I'd be happy to go back to the days of the Nokia. True, you couldn't go online on them, but was that such a bad thing? So much of what Stuart (and I) hate about modern tech comes from the ubiquity of smartphones. Nobody ever took a selfie with a Nokia, and the world was a happier place for it. But what I loved most about them was that they were just easy to hold. Then Apple's iPhone arrived and ruined everything. As Stuart said, you need fingers like ET's to use some of these new phones, which have screens only slightly smaller than a football pitch.

Shaun Hawking

of their little ones doing something "so cute", or "so cheeky" or "so pretty". So boring, more like.

Obviously, I enjoy seeing photos of my *own* grandchildren, but their parents use Facebook's security settings (www.snipca.com/18145) to keep the folders private. I'm glad they do too, because I'd be sickened by the thought that a paedophile would be getting his kicks from them. I know we shouldn't have to modify our behaviour because of a sick minority, but we have to be realistic.

Maybe Facebook should pop up a warning when parents upload a photo that is likely to be attractive to paedophiles?

Gordon Cresswell

Computers reduce us all to numbers

The problem of the police ignoring online fraud ('Question of the Fortnight', Issue 460) is symptomatic of the modern curse of giving too much power to computer programs. It unsettles me to think that were I to be conned by a scammer, my case may not be examined by the police if it was considered 'inappropriate' by a computer. Who runs this computer? Who writes the software for it? It all feels extremely abstract and shadowy. Anyone who has read Franz Kafka's *The Trial* will know what I mean.

It's the same with applying for a credit card or getting a mortgage. Instead of speaking to another human being to argue your case, you have to trust that a computer algorithm will give you the answer you want. If it doesn't, you can't do anything. There's no room for nuance or persuasion. We live in a binary world of yes and no. What happened to 'maybe'? What happened to 'ask again in six months'? Worryingly, we're heading into a future where everyone will be treated as a collection of numerical values, decided by a computer with no soul. I want no part of it.

Michael Benson

Why do people hate 'harmless' Solitaire?

Why is it open season on Solitaire? You've had people in the past two issues of *Computeractive* moaning about how pointless it is. I am slightly bemused why anyone would get so angry about a harmless card game that millions of people like to play on their PC.

Granted, Solitaire doesn't require the mental agility of chess, and it's not as exciting as poker. And it's not as sociable as Bridge (the clue is in the name). But there is something very calming about playing it. You can get a lot of satisfaction from it too. On my busy commute into London I see lots of people playing it. I do too. It helps prepare me for a hectic day at work, and then winds down my batteries on the journey home. Sorry if that offends so many people!

Rachel Kendall

Arnold Whitshaw may consider Solitaire to be a "tedious card game" ('Am I alone in hating Solitaire?', Issue 460), but it does have many uses. I teach computing to some members of our local community centre. Many of them are complete novices at using a computer, and sometimes find the requirement for good hand-eye coordination a bit beyond them.

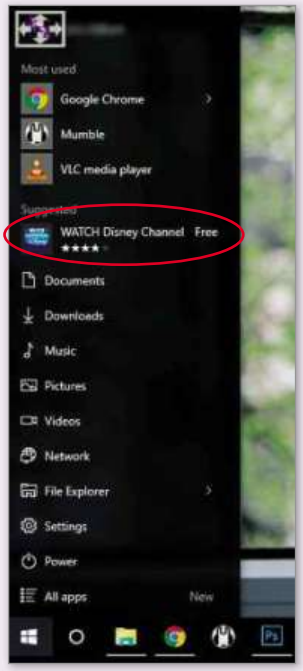
In order to help them gain the ability to use a mouse (as many of them find a touchpad difficult to master), we recommend they play some card games. Most choose to play Solitaire as this is the one they are familiar with. So Mr Whishaw, please remember that there are many who need to learn this skill, and Solitaire – or a similar game – is the best way of doing this.

Robin Davies

STAR LETTER

Stop getting so upset about Windows 10 adverts

I write in reply to your news story in Issue 460, warning us that adverts are now appearing in Windows 10's Start menu. I think we all need to calm down about advertising, and accept it's a part of modern life. Let's face facts: there are only two ways companies can make money – selling products and advertising. We all moan about adverts, but we'd moan twice as loudly if we had to pay for the services that companies can keep free because of the adverts placed on them.



People do seem to get more upset about advertising on the internet than anywhere else, such as on TV or on billboards. I don't really know why this is, but perhaps it's because from day one the internet was regarded by many people as a digital Utopia: somewhere immune to the corrupting influence of big business. I always thought that view was naive nonsense.

I accept that some adverts online are infuriating – particularly those underlined words that pop up an advert when you hover your mouse over them. They look like links that you click, so you're drawn to them. But they are just a cynical way to make you look at adverts. I think they should be banned. I have my own blacklist of sites that allow them.

But going back to Windows 10, let's consider what Microsoft is doing. The Disney Channel advert you highlighted in the Start menu (see screenshot) is very small. It's not an advert in the traditional sense, screaming for your attention. It seems more like the kind of recommendation Amazon gives you after you buy a product. As long as the adverts don't get any more intrusive, I'm prepared to tolerate them as a trade-off for getting Windows 10 for free.

Judith Chandler

The Star Letter writer wins a *Computeractive* mug!

Consumeractive

How long do I have to wait for a refund?

Q **In Issue 459's special report on the new Consumer Rights Act (CRA) you said that it allows you to claim a full refund for inherently faulty goods within 30 days of purchase. But what I'd like to know is, when I return the faulty goods how long must I wait for this refund?**

Sally Brown

A That's a good question and the answer is 14 days. But that doesn't tell the whole story. The 14-day period begins when the retailer admits a refund is due, not from the day you return the goods. This is because retailers have the right to examine

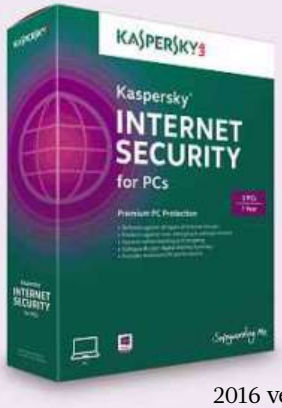
goods first and must do this without 'undue delay'. Then if they've agreed there isn't a problem or you've caused the damage, the clock starts ticking. The money should be paid back to the card with which you bought the item, unless you and the retailer agree otherwise.

CASE CLOSED

Can I get a refund if Kaspersky 2014 won't work with Windows 10?

Q **After upgrading my Acer Aspire 5734Z laptop from Windows 7 to Windows 10 I was annoyed to find that my two-year licence for Kaspersky Internet Security 2014 isn't compatible with the new operating system. I was told by Kaspersky to reinstall Windows 7 or use other security software. Because my licence is valid until the end of January 2016, shouldn't I be entitled to a working program?**

David Wilson



A Yes, David is legally entitled to expect his Kaspersky security software to work for two years. But Kaspersky doesn't have to make old software compatible with new operating systems (OS) such as Windows 10. This means David hasn't got a case against Kaspersky.

At the time David bought his two-year licence, Kaspersky would have been selling its 2014 software as compatible with Windows 7 and 8. Windows 10 didn't exist then, so the company had no way of making the software compatible with it. Kaspersky is within its rights to tell David that should he wish to continue using the 2014 software, he must revert to Windows 7.

However, Kaspersky has told us it will allow David to upgrade to the 2016 version of its software for free. This version *is* compatible with Windows 10. The company said he needs to uninstall the 2014 version, install its 2016 equivalent, and then type his authentication key, which should be in an email David received when he bought the licence in 2014. If he can't find the key, or has any other problems reinstalling the software he should contact Kaspersky's support team (www.kaspersky.co.uk/contact-us).

You can buy the 2016 edition of Kaspersky Internet Security 2016 for the special price of £19.99 from our Software Store. You'll find details of the limited discount, exclusive to *Computeractive* readers, on page 68.

CASE CLOSED

My iPad screen repair is fake – what can I do?

Q **I accidentally cracked my iPad Air screen and asked a local repair shop, Computer Repairs Conwy (CRC), to replace it. I told CRC I wanted a genuine Apple iPad screen put in. They said that wasn't a problem, so I paid £80. However, the replacement isn't an Apple screen – I think it's fake. I want my money back, plus the old screen so I can claim on my insurance. The repair shop said it couldn't return the old screen. What's my position from a legal standpoint?**

Sandy Mann

A Sandy told us she has proof that the replacement screen isn't a genuine Apple product. If that's the case, her legal position is that she's paid for goods that are 'not as described' and is therefore entitled to a refund. However, she can't claim for the cracked screen on her insurance because, CRC told us, it shattered when they removed it. This means Sandy doesn't have the screen as proof to show the insurance company.

We've talked to CRC's owner, who said his supplier had sold him the screens on the grounds that they were genuine Apple products. He said if this isn't the case, he wants to put things right. Although Sandy was reluctant to talk to CRC again, we told her it's better than taking the case to the small claims court. Hopefully, this can be resolved.

CASE CLOSED

We stand up for your legal rights

Contact us so we can investigate your case

Email: consumeractive@computeractive.co.uk

Write: Consumeractive, Computeractive, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD

Please include both your phone number and address.

Unfortunately, we can't reply to all your letters.

I thought I had six months to claim a refund – am I wrong?

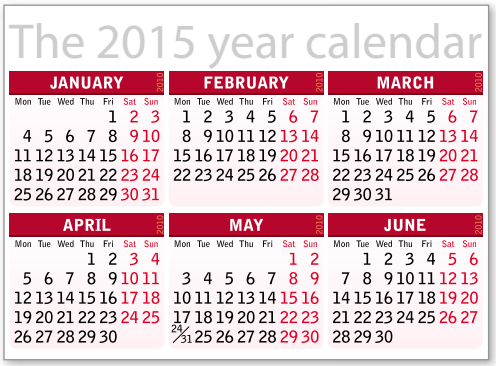
Q In Issue 440 (7-20 January, 2015), in response to a case about a faulty TomTom sat-nav, you said customers are entitled to a full refund only during the first 30 days after purchase. I've always been told that you're entitled to a full refund if the fault shows up within the first six months. The customer can then choose a full refund, replacement or repair. Have I got this wrong?

Doreen Richards

A Yes you have, though we can understand how the confusion has arisen because 30 days and six months *are* important turning points in the law – or at least, in how the law used to be, before 1 October, when the Consumer Rights Act (CRA) replaced the Sale of Goods Act (SOGA).

All goods bought before 1 October are covered by SOGA. This law says that you're entitled to claim a full refund for inherently faulty goods within 'a reasonable time' after purchase, typically understood to be 30 days. Up to 30 days, the retailer *must* refund you if the item is found to be inherently faulty. After 30 days, the retailer can first offer to replace or repair your item.

The six-month period relates to who has to prove an item is inherently faulty. Up to six months, the customer doesn't need to prove this; the onus is on the retailer to prove an item *isn't* faulty. It can do this by demonstrating that the item was accidentally damaged by the customer, or has been harmed by wear and tear. After six months, you have to prove the fault is inherent. Between 30 days and six months, a retailer can deduct money from a refund based on how long you've used the device. This six-month cut-off remains under the CRA.



LEGAL UPDATES

Does the CRA apply in Scotland and Channel Islands?

Several readers have asked us if the new Consumer Rights Act (CRA), which was implemented on 1 October, applies to companies in Scotland, as well as firms in the Channel Islands (specifically Jersey and Guernsey) who have sent goods to them on the mainland.

The CRA does cover Scotland, though some exemptions apply. Previously, under the Sale of Goods Act, you had up to five years to claim a refund in Scotland and six years in the rest of the UK. This distinction has been retained in the CRA.

However, the CRA doesn't apply to the Channel Islands, which have their own laws. These are often drawn up to reflect UK consumer laws, but Guernsey doesn't have an equivalent of SOGA, while Jersey introduced a version of SOGA as recently as 2009. We spoke to Trading Standards officials on both islands, who said that their parliaments will look closely at the CRA and would consider any appropriate legal changes to bring them more in line with UK law. This is important because some companies that you may think are UK firms are actually based in the Channel Islands for tax reasons. However, most of these insist they abide by UK law.

If you have a problem with a company trading in the Channel Islands, you should contact the appropriate trading standards office for advice. You'll find details on the Citizens Advice website: www.snipca.com/18256.

THIS WILL COME IN USEFUL

Help for web browsers

Chrome
Blog: http://chrome.blogspot.co.uk
Facebook: www.facebook.com/googlechrome
Help Centre: www.snipca.com/18169
Twitter: @googlechrome
User forums: www.snipca.com/18168

Firefox
Facebook: www.facebook.com/firefox
Help page: www.snipca.com/18171
Twitter: @Firefox
User forums: www.snipca.com/18170

Internet Explorer
Help page: www.snipca.com/18172
User forums: http://answers.microsoft.com/en-us/ie

Microsoft Edge
Facebook: www.facebook.com/microsoftedge
Help page: www.snipca.com/18174
Twitter: @MicrosoftEdge
User forums: www.snipca.com/18173

Opera
Blog: http://blogs.opera.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/opera
Help pages: www.opera.com/help
Twitter: @Opera
User forums: http://forums.opera.com

Safari
Help page: www.snipca.com/18176
User forums: www.snipca.com/18175

Protect Your Tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Leftover data on hardware you sell

What happened?

Experts in data removal warned people planning to sell their devices online to make sure they are completely wiped, following a study that suggests almost half of second-hand hardware contains leftover files.

Researchers at Blancco Technology Group and Kroll Ontrack made the claim after examining 122 phones, SSDs and hard drives they bought on eBay in the US, UK and Germany.

Nearly 50 per cent of hard drives and SSDs contained data the previous owner had failed to wipe, while around 35 per cent of phones and tablets contained personal data, such as emails, logs of phone calls, texts, photos and videos. In total they found 2,153 emails and 10,838 texts.

Interestingly, the researchers found evidence that many owners had tried to remove data. They said that these attempts hadn't worked because the owners had used unreliable data-deletion methods, such as restoring the device to factory settings. Data left on two of the phones revealed enough information to allow the researchers to fully identify the previous owners.

No data was found on any of the second-hand iPhones or iPads analysed. Paul Henry, who works for Blancco, said this was because Apple uses encrypted storage, making recovery "impossible". Android devices don't use this method, instead relying on the user to overwrite data.

What should you do?

First, treat this study with some caution. Blancco is a data-destruction company, while Kroll Ontrack recovers it. Both have a vested interest in persuading people that they aren't doing enough to destroy data before selling devices.

But don't overlook the central message that eliminating data is crucial, and that it's often harder to do than you may think. Resetting devices to factory settings doesn't delete data, and won't stop criminals accessing it using specialised software.

To wipe a hard drive consider the free program KillDisk (www.killdisk.com). If you're selling an Android device, use Avast's free Anti-Theft app to delete data (www.snipca.com/18189, see screenshot).

New tools

Cyscon Security Shield

www.snipca.com/18192

Unless you spend your life Googling the words 'websites hacked', it's impossible to keep track of all the websites you should avoid. What you need is the Firefox add-on Cyscon Security Shield, which warns you when you're at risk.

Created by German security firm Cyscon, the add-on sits in the top right of your browser, scanning every site you visit. When it detects anything untoward, exclamation marks appear in its shield icon. Click these to see a warning about the threat posed by the site. We tested it on Ashley Madison and TalkTalk, and were impressed that it explained the specific danger: personal info stolen from the former, and malicious adverts on the latter (see screenshot). Click the blue 'in the news' link below the warning to read more about the threat on security blogs.

ScamWatch

READERS WARN READERS

Windows 10 upgrade scam

I got a phone call from a foreign-sounding person who said he was from Microsoft and that the Windows licence on my PC had expired. I said, 'which computer?' He asked 'how many have you got?'. 'Three', I said - an Apple Mac, a PC I built and a clone of that on my Mac. This baffled him and he repeated that I should upgrade to Windows 10 now. I told him I will upgrade when more of the bugs have been fixed. He then became aggressive and said he would shut down my PC. He then hung up. It's a scam that Microsoft is aware of: www.snipca.com/18129.

Aleck Seddon

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

pcspecialist

PC Specialist recommends Windows

Windows 10

Unleash the gamer within you

VULCAN 440

Overclocked Intel® Core™ i7-4790K
ASUS® Maximus VII Ranger
16GB HyperX FURY RAM
4GB NVIDIA® GeForce® GTX 980
500GB Samsung EVO 850 SSD
2TB Hard Drive
Windows 8.1

from **£1,499***

"Vulcan 440 wraps an array of high-end hardware in a sleek, well-put-together package"
Parm Mann, Hexus.net

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DIARY

RedNotebook

http://rednotebook.sourceforge.net
What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10

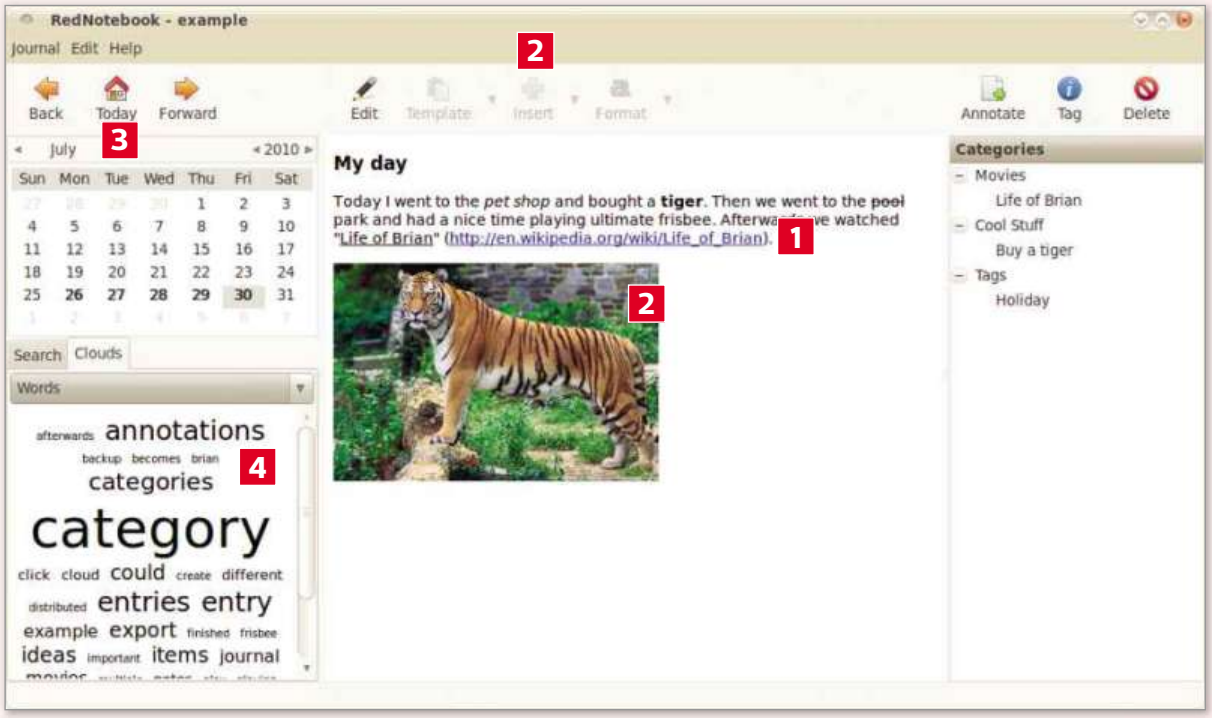
Keeping a diary on your computer rather than in a lovely spiral-bound notebook sounded like a daft idea until we tried out this free new program.

RedNotebook lets you create, edit, organise, search and save your diary – or many different diaries. You could have a travel journal, a cooking diary, a diary of ideas for that novel you're going to write one day – whatever fits the format. Customisable templates let you give each diary its own look and structure, and there are plenty of text-formatting options. Your entries can include photos, files (scanned documents, for example) and web links. Everything is saved automatically, so your work won't be lost if you get distracted or your PC suddenly crashes.

To make your archive easy to navigate, RedNotebook supports tags, a bit like the hashtags you see all over the internet. There's no need to use the hash symbol; just save certain keywords and phrases – say, 'red kite' for your birding diary, or 'museum' for your travel journal. Tags appear in a big 'word cloud' on the left of the program window. Simply click a tag to see all the times you've mentioned it. There's also a search box for more conventional searching.

Save whole diaries or sections in various formats (PDF, HTML, plain text or ebook format Latex: www.snipca.com/18341). You can back up your entire archive as a ZIP file if you want.

To download the installer, click the big grey 'RedNotebook 1.10.3' button and then click the 'Download rednotebook' EXE link on Sourceforge (www.snipca.com/18333; it currently says version 1.8 rather than 1.10.3, but this may depend on your version of Windows). Installation is straightforward, with no unwanted extras, and it's open-source software so it will always be free. There's also a portable version (www.snipca.com/18332), which is ideal if you're thinking of upgrading to Windows 10 soon and don't want to lose your diary data.



1 Write your diary entries in the main window. You can format your text using bold, italics and so on. Web addresses automatically appear as links.

2 To add photos, scanned documents and other media files to a diary entry, click Insert and then navigate to the file on your computer.

3 In the calendar at the top-left, click a specific day to go straight to any entries you created on that day. Click the Today logo to jump back to today.

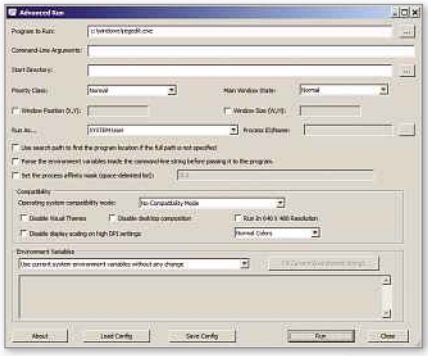
4 Click a tag in the 'word cloud' to see all instances of it in your selected diary. The word cloud is empty by default, but it will fill up as your diary takes shape.

PROGRAM SETTINGS

Advanced Run

www.snipca.com/18335

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10



This settings-tweaking tool is the latest release from NirSoft, the company (well, one man – Nir Sofer) behind the brilliant NirLauncher all-utilities-in-one program, which you can read about in Secret Tips on page 48.

Advanced Run is a portable tool that lets you set default variables for running your installed software. You might use it to set a certain photo-editing program to always run full-screen, for example, or for CCleaner to always run as administrator. You can even use it to make certain programs always run in Windows XP compatibility mode, without making changes in the Registry. If you like using Command Prompt, save your Advanced Run configurations as files that you can run from the command line.

GENEALOGY

Redwood Family Tree

www.snipca.com/18334

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10

Good genealogy software tends to dent your pocket. For example, Family Tree Maker (www.snipca.com/18342) from Ancestry.co.uk is £23.99. Family Tree Builder from MyHeritage.com (www.snipca.com/18343) is free and we've mentioned it before, but it's a huge program and can be difficult to get to grips with. Redwood Family Tree is a smaller, faster alternative that installs very quickly, with no PUPs and no paid-for version. It opens immediately, filling your screen with self-explanatory blank spaces for you to get cracking with. There's a Help manual built into the program, and a support site at www.snipca.com/18344.

WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

We tell you what software to use

What can I use instead of Windows DVD Maker?

Q **I've been using Windows DVD Maker on Windows 7 for a long time, but it's not available in Windows 10 and I can't find an equivalent tool. Can you suggest a program that has the same features as DVD Maker?**

John Stoyles

A We loved DVD Maker (www.snipca.com/18353), too. This free tool worked in Windows 7 and Vista, and let you create DVD videos and photo slideshows that you could play on your PC or, using a standard DVD player, your TV. You could also create customised DVD menus. The tool hasn't been updated since November 2014 so it's effectively been discontinued.

What should you use instead, then? Many DVD-authoring programs are 'freemium', which means there are hidden costs (paying to remove watermarks, for example). We like DVDStyler (www.dvdstyler.org) because it's open-source (like RedNotebook, opposite) and will therefore always be free, and it works in all current versions of Windows. You can import your photos, video clips and even songs or audio clips into your project, and you get more freedom over designing menus than in DVD Maker.

To get it, click the green Download Now button or go to its Sourceforge page (www.snipca.com/18357), which also has a Support section. There are no PUPs in the installer.

In the next issue of *Computeractive* we'll go looking for lots more alternatives to great tools that are no longer available in Windows 10.

Do you need our advice on what software to use? Just email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

NEW

The Definitive Guide to Free Software

You'll find more superb free programs in our new 144-page book: *The Definitive Guide to Free Software*

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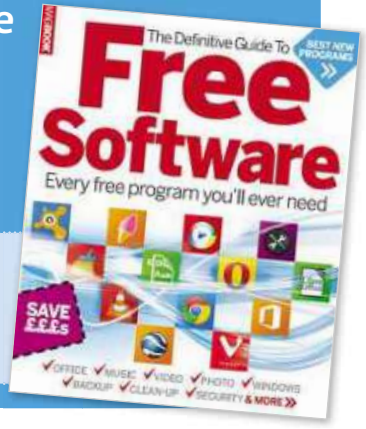
at www.snipca.com/16785



Reviews

New products tested by our experts

TABLETS | From **£50** from Amazon www.amazon.co.uk/fire

Amazon Fire tablets (2015)

Amazon's latest own-brand Fire tablets look cheap, but are they any good?

When the iPad first came out, there were debates about whether it was intended for creation or consumption. All you could do with it was gawp at things and play silly games, said the doubters. But look at all the office software, music tools, photo- and video-editing, art, education and more, said its fans, as all of those apps began to appear. Once MPs, doctors and airline pilots were being equipped with iPads as standard, the argument was won. Tablets aren't just for watching stuff on the internet.

> "The cheapest tablets worth buying, but be aware of their limitations"

Yet here's Amazon with a new range of tablets just for watching stuff on the internet. Specifically, ebooks, videos and apps that you buy from Amazon's online store or get 'free' with an Amazon Prime subscription. Free, in this case, means £79 a year. As well as one-day delivery on most physical purchases, that gets you access to a large collection of films and TV episodes and a catalogue of music.

You're not forced to sign up for Prime, but that's what Amazon hopes you'll do. So it wants to sell you a cheap tablet that'll last long enough for you to renew your £79 subscription. All of these tablets feel able to survive a few tumbles, as long as the screen doesn't hit the floor first: you don't get super-tough glass at these prices.

Fire Kids Edition tablet

Addressing that concern, the £100 **Fire Kids Edition** is guaranteed against everything, including butterfingers *and* fingers smeared with butter. If you or your little ones smash it up within two years, Amazon will hand you a new one, no questions asked. To help ensure it doesn't have to, it provides a brightly coloured rubber case, available in pink or blue (see image below left). This guarantee is partly the reason you're paying twice the price of the 7in tablet that lives inside.

It also covers one year of 'Fire for Kids Unlimited', which lets you download thousands of ebooks, educational apps and games, and watch a selection of children's TV shows, at no extra cost. After 12 months, you'll pay £3.99 a month to keep this up. Subscribe to Prime – not included – and that goes down to £1.99. There's just no escaping the fact that Amazon is offering you low prices now to take your money later.

Although many parents will prefer to supervise younger kids directly, Amazon provides options to control what they can and can't do. It's also planning a child-friendly web browser so they can freely surf vetted sites.

Fire tablet

With its 7in screen, the £50 **Amazon Fire** is smaller than an iPad mini. It's not particularly thin or light, but does feel robust, and the matt plastic is comfortable to hold. The first compromise you'll notice is the display, which is dull and grainy. The 2-megapixel main camera is more like the quality we'd expect from a webcam, and with no flash it barely works indoors.

In use, the Fire's processor is so slow you have to wait for it to respond to your taps and swipes. Amazon had a perverse sense of humour when it called its web browser Silk: smooth it ain't. When we played fancy games like Hearthstone they kept stuttering to a halt. This is a basic tablet for basic tasks.

At eight hours 43 minutes of video playback, battery life was enough to get us through a day. The built-in 8GB of storage will fill up in no time, especially if you take advantage of the free apps from Prime or Kids Unlimited, but the Fire's microSD slot means you can expand it: a 32GB card will cost you about £10 from, you've guessed it, Amazon. They really aren't daft, are they?

Fire HD tablet

The two larger models, at eight and 10 inches, have a screen resolution of 1280x800, enough for 720p HD video, but well short of 1080p Full HD. Again, it looks coarse. The widescreen format is unwieldy to hold, and web pages feel either too wide or too narrow.

Thanks to their slippery metal construction, these tablets are skinnier than the 7in Fire. The rear camera has five megapixels and can shoot 1080p video, but it's still poor. The biggest difference is a faster processor. Browsing web pages and playing games felt less of a struggle, but switching between apps still represented something of a challenge. Continuous video playback ran down the battery in just over nine hours.

It's hard to justify the £170 price tag of the **Fire HD 10**. Google's Nexus 9 may be older and slightly smaller, but for only a little more money it offers smoother performance, much longer battery life, and an ultra-sharp screen, like the iPad Air, in the more practical 4:3 format. The only catch is that its 16GB of storage can't be supplemented with a microSD card.

The £129 **Fire HD 8** is more appealing. Although it only has 8GB built in (16GB costs extra), you get the microSD slot and the same processor and camera at a lower price, and the screen resolution looks better at this size. The tablet is easier to hold, and you don't seem to sacrifice any battery life compared to the 10in.

Software

A Prime subscription includes Amazon Underground (www.snipca.com/18193), which makes hundreds of paid-for apps free, including in-app purchases. These are mostly games, including favourites like Fruit Ninja, Goat Simulator (yes, really) and Monument Valley. Beyond this, the range of apps is limited. Although Amazon's operating system, Fire OS, is based on Google's Android, it doesn't come with the Google Play app store. Apps like Microsoft Office, available for Android and iPad, aren't compatible, and the hardware isn't powerful enough for more ambitious tasks.

Amazon's Kindle Fire HDX 8.9in came with Mayday, which let you video-chat with a tech-support person. That's not included with these models, but you can phone Amazon and they can demonstrate things remotely on your screen.

The Fire is undeniably the cheapest tablet worth buying, but be aware of its limitations. The HD versions face stiffer competition, and Amazon's commercial tie-ins could soon start to grate. If videos and games are your thing, though, they're worth a look.

SPECIFICATIONS

Fire and Fire Kids Edition: 1.3GHz quad-core MediaTek processor • 8GB flash storage • 7in 1024x600-pixel touchscreen • 2-megapixel rear camera • 0.3-megapixel webcam • 802.11n Wi-Fi • microSD card slot • 191x115x10.6mm (HxWxD) • 313g (405g with case) • One-year warranty (two years for Kids Edition) www.amazon.co.uk/fire

Fire HD 8/10: 1.5GHz quad-core MediaTek processor • 8GB/16GB flash storage • 8in/10.1in 1280x800-pixel touchscreen • 5-megapixel rear camera • 0.9-megapixel webcam • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • microSD card slot • 214x128x7.7mm/262x159x7.7mm • 311g/432g • One-year warranty www.amazon.co.uk/fire

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PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT: A step down in price is always welcome, but this feels like a step back for tablets

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Tesco Hudl 2 £99
It doesn't come with the first-year freebies of the similarly priced Fire Kids Edition, but this is still a better tablet with more apps than the 7in Fire

PC | £700 (incl. monitor, keyboard and mouse) from Vibox www.snipca.com/18160

Vibox Exile

All-round desktop PC that's beyond the ordinary

Everyone in science fiction has a silly name. It's always Grand Phage Zebulus Ka'alantis, Fourteenth Lymptus of the Bliquity of Strope – never Emma Hodgkins. There's a lot of fun to be had in this, of course, but it can get confusing.

That hasn't stopped marketing departments inventing daft titles for things. Cars, appliances, razors, phones – they all get the fantasy moniker treatment. And, occasionally, PCs too. Thus 'Vibox Exile', which sounds less like it should be sitting on your desk and more like it should be wandering lost through an apocalyptic wilderness in some dystopian sci-fi epic. If you think that's exotic, the chassis in which it's built is officially known as the Phanteks Enthoo Evolv. And it's kept cool by a processor heatsink called Raijintek Themis.

> "A great-value, well equipped PC with space-age style and thoughtful design"

The Exile has suitably space-age styling, with a 'stealth' feel to its squat, angular black case. Vibration-damping screws and brackets give the impression of a design that's been carefully thought out, and because its 200mm main fan is so huge, it doesn't have to work hard, so you'll never hear more than a whisper from it.

The Mini-ITX format makes this PC less bulky than a full tower, but also leaves less room for manoeuvre inside. There's only one fast PCI-Express slot, which is already used by the graphics card, and with Wi-Fi included, no free slots are left for any other cards, such as a TV tuner. Two spare drive bays (one 2.5in and one 3.5in) let you add storage, but none is big enough for a DVD drive. Most extras can be connected externally, of course: there are plenty of fast USB 3.0 ports.

As it stands, the Exile is already a well-equipped PC. Although the quad-core Intel i5 processor isn't the latest available, it's still towards the upper reaches of the mid-range, and will handle office and creative tasks efficiently. 8GB of memory should be adequate, but it comes as two 4GB modules in order to maximise speed. You'd need to replace both to upgrade to 16GB, which is the upper limit.

In our tests, the GTX 960 graphics card just about coped with the most demanding 3D games even at Full HD resolution with the highest quality settings, so you'll certainly be able to play whatever you want by turning things down a bit. Having a proper graphics card also helps with tasks like video editing, which are possible but annoyingly slow on less powerful PCs.

The PC itself is currently selling for a very reasonable £600, and for an extra £100 Vibox will add an Asus 22in monitor plus keyboard and mouse. The screen is a tad smaller than average, and obviously a budget model, but it displays nearly 96 per cent of the sRGB colour range, which is excellent at this price. We're back in sci-fi territory with the keyboard and mouse set, Cooler Master's CM Storm Devastator. These are made for gamers, but that's good news for the rest of us, because the mouse is precise and the keyboard's traditional clicky keys will please typists more than the flat tiles or mushy buttons often supplied with PCs.

Unless you want to add multiple drives, twin graphics cards or specialist extras, this is a capable all-round PC in a high-quality case. The bundle deal that includes a monitor, keyboard and mouse is great value.

SPECIFICATIONS

3.5GHz quad-core Intel Core i5 4690 processor • 8GB memory • 1TB hybrid drive • MSI GeForce GTX 960 Gaming graphics • 6x USB 3 ports • 2x USB 2 ports • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Gigabit Ethernet port • DVI port • HDMI port • 3x DisplayPort • 22in 1920x1080 monitor • Keyboard and mouse • Windows 10 Home • 375x230x395mm (HxWxD) • Two-year warranty
www.snipca.com/18160

VERDICT: Don't banish it from your shortlist: the Exile has everything you need in a desktop computer except space

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: CCL Nebula 200i £700 This rival Mini-ITX system comes with a bigger but more basic monitor and isn't quite as fast

LAPTOP-TABLET | **£550** from John Lewis www.snipca.com/18217

Acer Aspire Switch 11 V

A rival for Microsoft's Surface 3?

Laptop or tablet? It seemed a relatively easy decision before the computer industry started merging the two. So far, laptops that pretend to be tablets have fared better than vice versa, with one exception: Microsoft's Surface. The Surface, now in its fourth incarnation, is the equivalent of an iPad that runs Windows 10. With its optional Type Cover keyboard, the basic Surface 3 costs £529.

Here's the new Aspire Switch 11 V, which has a bigger screen, twice the memory and storage, can also run Windows 10, and costs £550. Its keyboard feels like one from a proper laptop, and its processor scores better. Surface or Switch? On the surface (pun intended) it seems a relatively easy decision.

> "Impressive specifications can't quite hide its screen and battery flaws"

But let's take a closer look. The tablet part of the Switch 11 is plastic, not metal like the Surface 3. At 760g, it's noticeably heavier than the Surface 3's 622g, but in return you get a larger 11.6in display. This is bright and has decent contrast, but only covers 70 per cent of the sRGB colour range, compared with the Surface's 97 per cent. The Full HD (1920x1080 pixels) resolution matches the Surface 3, and the extra inch brings Windows closer to laptop size.

Connecting the keyboard nearly doubles the weight, but the keys and trackpad work well. There's a version of the Switch that offers a 500GB hard drive packed into the keyboard to complement the 128GB of flash memory in the tablet. Magnetic prongs hold the keyboard in place, and a stiff hinge lets you open it to a fixed angle. Truth be told, it's a bit too stiff and you'll need both hands to open it.

The keyboard section has a full-size USB 3.0 port, while the tablet has a MicroUSB connector (rather than the new Type-C) for accessories and charging, a microSD slot for memory cards, and a micro HDMI port for a monitor.

Thanks to the Intel Core M processor, Windows 10 apps and web pages ran smoothly, with no juddery delays as we scrolled around. Forget about playing top-end 3D games, but the likes of Hearthstone and Minecraft work fine, though the chip can get very hot inside, making the Switch 11 almost uncomfortable to hold. That waste of energy helps to explain the short battery life: we struggled to get more than four hours. Not like a tablet after all.

VERDICT: There's no denying the Switch 11 is good value, but the dull screen, overheating and meagre battery life are off-putting

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Microsoft Surface 3 £419 This is the cheapest you'll find the Surface 3, though it lacks the Type Cover keyboard

SPECIFICATIONS

0.8GHz Intel Core M 5Y10c processor • 4GB memory • 128GB flash storage • 500GB hard drive • 11.6in 1920x1080-pixel screen • Webcam • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.0 • MicroSD card slot • Windows 8.1 (free upgrade to Windows 10) • 21x300x207mm (HxWxD) • 1.46kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18215

The best... Low-cost monitors

iiyama ProLite XU2390HS-B1

£134 from Amazon www.snipca.com/17603

At 23 inches, this monitor provides 1920x1080 pixels, matching Full HD film and TV resolution. Colour reproduction is good, covering 93 per cent of the sRGB range. There's no leakage from the backlight, although the stand is of the wobbly plastic kind without much in the way of adjustment.

ViewSonic VX2363Smhl-W

£134 from Amazon www.snipca.com/18206

This 1920x1080-pixel 23in monitor is impressive for the price. Colour accuracy is similar to the iiyama monitor, and images look great at any angle. Fast response time means it can keep up with games, and there's no flicker – not that flicker is normally a problem these days. There are two HDMI inputs, but no DVI or DisplayPort.

Dell UltraSharp U2414H

£189 from Scan www.snipca.com/18207

This 1920x1080-pixel 24in screen shows why it's worth paying a bit more. The elegant stand is adjustable and can rotate into portrait mode. Colour accuracy is excellent, and the on-screen menus are easy to use. There are DisplayPort and Mini DisplayPort connections, two HDMI inputs, and a four-port USB 3.0 hub.

BenQ EW2750ZL

£182 from Amazon www.snipca.com/18208

This 27in screen with 1920x1080 resolution offers very good picture quality. The narrow bezel and tiltable stand look classy from the front, despite acres of glossy plastic at the back, and the semi-matt glass avoids reflections. BenQ's methods of reducing screen blur in games still aren't entirely successful, but apps and films look great.

SMARTPHONE | **£539** from Apple www.snipca.com/18240

Computer active BUY IT! ★★★★★

Apple iPhone 6s

Probably the best smartphone in the world

The 6s and 6s Plus look identical to last year's 6 and 6 Plus, but don't be fooled. The aluminium case has been strengthened to stop twits on the internet making videos of themselves bending it. There's a new colour, Rose Gold – 'pink' to you and me. And while the touchscreen presents the same brilliant Retina display on the outside, it has a new trick on the inside.

Behind the glass, 'strain gauges' detect pressure from your finger. Apple calls this 3D Touch. For example, the Home screen in iOS 9, the new version of Apple's mobile software, looks much the same as before, with app icons that you tap to open. But if you press an icon instead of just tapping, a menu pops up. Press the Clock icon, and you can set an alarm. Press Maps, and it offers you directions home.

> "These are superb phones at high, but fair, prices"

Inside apps, you get 'peek and pop'. While you're looking at a list of emails, for example, you can press one to bring up the full message, until you let go. It's quicker than tapping to open the message and then having to think about how to go back to the list. While you're peeking at the message, you can press a bit harder to 'pop' it open.

Photos work the same way: press a thumbnail to enlarge it, then let go, or press harder to edit or share it. You can even press a link and see the web page it would go to. It's a great idea. Our only complaint is that 3D Touch ought to feel more 'real'. It isn't quite instant, and the little vibration that tells you it's worked always comes from the bottom of the phone, not where you're pressing.

The other addition is Live Picture. Every time you take a photo, the iPhone 6s or 6s Plus also records three seconds of video. So when you tap a picture later, it briefly comes alive, like the newspaper photos in Harry Potter. This works well as long as the subject is moving slightly while the camera and background stay still; otherwise, it looks a bit mad.

Even if you turn off Live Picture, you still have a great camera. It has 12 megapixels – up from eight – without compromising the excellent automatic focus, exposure and colour balance. You can also choose to shoot video at 4K resolution, four times Full HD. That takes more storage space, and if you like to edit your videos, it'll slow down your software. But we did find that 4K footage looked a little sharper.

As before, there are lovely slow-motion options at lower resolutions, and the larger Plus model, from £619, has image-stabilisation hardware to prevent camera shake in photos and keep videos steady. The software already does a good job of that, but it helps even more. The 5.5in screen keeps its Full HD (1920x1080-pixel) resolution, which works out even finer than the 4.7in version.

Both sizes have fingerprint recognition and Apple Pay.

Whichever you pick, the new A9 processor substantially increases the iPhone's power, so it's still one of the fastest mobile devices you can get, and feels super-smooth to use. It's just a shame battery life hasn't increased; in fact, it can run out slightly faster than before. The iPhone 6s lasted for 11 hours and 18 minutes of video usage, nearly four hours less than the Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge. It might be worth considering the Plus just for its bigger battery.

These are superb phones at high, but fair, prices. Just make sure you get enough storage: it's worth paying the extra £80 for 64GB, because you can't add to it later.

SPECIFICATIONS

4.7in 1334x750-pixel screen • 12-megapixel rear camera • 5-megapixel front camera • 16GB flash storage • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.2 • 3G/4G • iOS 9 • 138x67x7.1mm (HxWxD) • 143g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18251

VERDICT: Other phones may beat Apple's in one area or another, but the iPhone's combination of hardware and software is still the best

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE: Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge £431
The unique curved screen isn't the only great feature of this Android phone, with a similar choice of sizes

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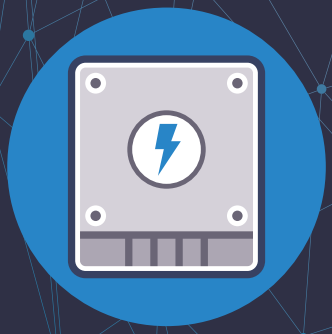

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Sony Xperia Z3+

Not the phablet we were hoping for

Counting is harder than it looks. The French get to 69 without much trouble, then panic and say 'sixty-ten' before moving on to 'four twenties'. Microsoft goes 1, 2, 3, 3.1, 95, 98, ME, XP, Vista, 7, 8, 10. Apple prefers 1, 3G, 3GS, 4, 4S, 5, 5s and 5c, 6, 6s. Google just lists snacks (KitKat, Lollipop and so on).

So we're not too shocked that Sony's much-anticipated successor to its Xperia Z3 smartphone isn't the Z4, but the Z3+. In Japan, though, they've just called it the Z4. This raises all sorts of questions. Are we in Europe too tolerant of irrationality, while our Pacific cousins demand logic? And what are they going to call the next version – Z4 here, Z4+ in Japan? If they just go with Z5, they'll never convince us we haven't missed out on something.

For now, we're already missing out on something: a new Xperia. This feels like last year's. Not that we didn't like last year's: its squared-off aluminium frame, big (but not too big) screen and glass back look classy, and the whole thing is waterproof, now without a plastic flap on the microUSB charging port.

The 5.2in Full HD display comes close to the iPhone 6s Plus. It's slightly smaller, so it looks incredibly sharp, although the likes of Samsung's Galaxy S6 are even sharper. It goes very bright when required, but not very dark when it isn't, so images can sometimes look a bit washed-out. On the other hand, you can see more detail in dark films. Almost the whole sRGB colour range is covered.

> "It's classy with a sharp screen, but feels like last year's model"

But this is still all pretty much the same as before. What's new is the Snapdragon 810 processor chip, which beats most other current phones and makes all tasks, including web browsing, as smooth as an Android device can get. Sony's version of Android is neat and tidy, and there are extra features for PlayStation owners. The 20.7-megapixel camera also gets more software options, but still doesn't take pictures that look as nice as Apple's, although it copes well with low light.

In making a skinnier phone with higher performance, Sony unfortunately forgot there was a battery to fit in. The Z3+ lasted just under 13 hours 20 minutes, compared to the Z3's 18-and-a-half hours. That's disappointing, but as good as the S6 and between the iPhone 6s and 6s Plus.

SPECIFICATIONS

5.2in 1920x1080-pixel screen • 20.7-megapixel rear camera • 5-megapixel front camera • 32GB flash storage • MicroSD card slot • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.1 • 3G/4G • Android 5.1 • 146x72x6.9mm (HxWxD) • 144g • One-year warranty
www.snipca.com/18205

VERDICT: We're underwhelmed by the improvements, but the Z3+ is another well-made device, now with very slick performance

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Samsung Galaxy S6 £400 This similarly priced phone isn't as striking as the more expensive S6 Edge, but has a better screen and camera than the Z3+

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

What's the best basic Windows 10 laptop?

Q **I want a basic laptop for Windows 10, but most are advertised with Windows 8.1, and I'm not sure how powerful it needs to be. What do you advise?**

Pamela Davis

A A lot of PCs still come with Windows 8.1 – it doesn't mean they won't run Windows 10, it just means manufacturing and distribution hasn't caught up.

Windows 10 will run on all recent PCs that were delivered with Windows 8.1. It's free and simple to upgrade over the internet, taking about an hour. You should be prompted to upgrade when you start up your new PC. Alternatively, a Windows icon at the bottom right of the screen lets you 'Get Windows 10'.

Many new laptops do already have Windows 10. A good place to start looking is companies that build PCs to order. Buy a laptop from Chillblast (www.snipca.com/18258), PC Specialist (www.snipca.com/18259) or DinoPC (www.snipca.com/18263), for example, and you'll receive it in two to 10 days with Windows 10 installed.

HP's Pavilion x2 (pictured) is a good low-cost laptop that doubles as a tablet, using Windows 10's Tablet mode (see our review, Issue 457). HP is selling it at a £20 discount with Windows 8.1 (£229 from www.snipca.com/18262), but it'll soon be available with Windows 10.

Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

TABLET | **£290** from Expansys www.snipca.com/18161

Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 8.0

An Android rival for the iPad mini 4

Computer active BUY IT! ★★★★★

Some people say Samsung copies Apple's products. Some of those people are even judges. But nobody can accuse Samsung of copying this tablet from the iPad mini 4. If it's a copy of anything, it's the iPad mini 3. It has a screen the same size and shape, with the same number of pixels; wide borders at the top and bottom, and narrow at the sides; and a Home button that doubles as a fingerprint sensor.

The surprise, though, is how close it actually gets to being as good as an iPad. Though heavier, it's even thinner, yet feels just as sturdy. The display has been changed from the earlier Tab's widescreen to the iPad's squarer 4:3 dimensions. Some space is wasted when watching films, but it's more practical for other purposes. Samsung's AMOLED technology gives a theoretically infinite contrast range, because black pixels emit no light. At the other end of the scale, the whitest this panel can go is less than 80 per cent as bright as the iPad, but it's adequate, and colours look superb. Overall, we'd put the two screens on a par with each other.

> "It's the best Android tablet so far and much cheaper than the equivalent iPad"

The S2 8.0 has a more powerful processor than the iPad mini 3, but can't keep up with the iPad mini 4. It's a tad faster when carrying out really demanding tasks that can make use of all its eight cores, but otherwise it's slower, sometimes considerably so. Web pages load and scroll more smoothly on the iPad. As far as graphics go, the S2 8.0 is slower than both the iPad mini 4 and Samsung's new large tablet, the S2 9.7. Nevertheless, it's unlilkely to struggle with games.

The rear camera has eight megapixels – like the iPad's. The aperture (controlling how much light the lens allows in) is wider, at f/1.9 compared with f/2.4, but pictures still seem grainy in low light.

Like the iPad mini, the S2 8.0 has a fairly long battery life. Playing video, with the screen brightness at a medium level, we got just over 14 hours out of it, compared with just under 11 on Apple's tablet. That suggests Samsung's processor is more efficient when less is demanded of it. Get on Wi-Fi, play games or turn the brightness up, though, and the S2 8.0 begins to drain quite quickly, dipping below six hours.

The S2 8.0 officially starts at the same price (£319) as the iPad mini 4, but with twice the storage at 32GB. While Apple's retail prices generally hold firm, Samsung's are regularly discounted, so you can find the S2 for less. Apple's 16GB is not enough if you want to install a lot of apps, buy HD films or shoot a lot of photos and videos, but 32GB is sufficient for most people. So the basic S2 8.0 is really competing with Apple's next model up, which comes with 64GB at £399. In comparison, the S2 looks like a bargain, especially considering you can upgrade its memory with microSD cards for under a tenner.

Then again, it runs Android (Lollipop, 5.0,2), which hasn't fully caught up with Apple's iOS in ease of use, simplicity and security. No tablet feels as seamless and smooth in operation as the iPad. If you'd bought the very first iPad mini when it came out three years ago, you'd be able to upgrade it now to iOS 9. With Android, it's pot luck whether even last year's devices can upgrade. And its jump in processing power makes the iPad mini 4 particularly future-proof.

So excellent hardware may not justify choosing an Android tablet. But an Android tablet as good as this one, at such a competitive price, is a reason to think seriously about it.

SPECIFICATIONS

1.3GHz Samsung Exynos 5433 eight-core processor • 32GB flash storage • 8in 2048x1536-pixel screen • 8-megapixel rear camera • 1.2-megapixel webcam • microSD slot • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.1 • Android 5.0.2 • 199x135x5.6mm (HxWxD) • 389g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/18162

VERDICT: It's no iPad, but if you're going to buy a small Android tablet, this is as good it gets

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE: iPad mini 4 £319 Better to use, but cramped with just 16GB and no memory card slot; consider paying £399 for the 64GB option

MUSIC STREAMER | **£30** from Google Store www.snipca.com/18222

Google Chromecast Audio

Stream music from phone to hi-fi

There are lots of ways to get music and radio on your smartphone or tablet, but how do you listen to it? A good way is to attach something that can receive audio wirelessly to your hi-fi, TV sound bar or multimedia speakers. This is the latest example of such a device, and at 30 quid it's got to be worth a look.

The original Chromecast was a stick you plugged into your HDTV to play video from your phone and tablet. Google has recently updated that and added this, an audio-only version. Instead of an HDMI plug, the tiny disc has a jack cable to plug into a hi-fi system (using your own adapter if your stereo uses different sockets). It also needs power, so it comes with a microUSB mains brick.

Setting up the Chromecast Audio is easy. The awkward part is that it's only designed to work with apps that support it. So far, that includes popular services like Spotify, but BBC iPlayer Radio is coming soon. If you have an Android device, you can play from incompatible apps by 'mirroring' the audio output, albeit reducing quality a bit. That doesn't work with Apple devices, though.

Transmission is over your Wi-Fi network, and worked well for us, with strong reception and good sound quality. Unlike with the Gramofon (see our review, Issue 460), you can't buy multiple Chromecasts and control them all from one place, but Google plans to add this 'multi-room' ability in a free update.

SPECIFICATIONS

802.11n Wi-Fi • 3.5mm stereo analogue/optical digital output • 13.5x52x52mm (HxWxD) • Requires a device with Android 4.1, iOS 7.0, OS X 10.7 or Windows 7 or later • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18221

VERDICT: It's not currently as flexible as the Gramofon, but the Chromecast Audio is excellent value. If the promised features materialise it should be worth five stars

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Fon Gramofon £44 Adds a wired (Ethernet) networking option and multi-room capability, making it worth the extra money. See competition on page 33.

RECORD TURNTABLE | **£229** from Henley Designs www.snipca.com/18226

Pro-Ject Elemental Phono USB

Success on a platter

After years patiently explaining that the hole in your car dashboard was originally designed for a plastic box that played magnetic tape, and the tray that pops out of your PC isn't a cup holder, anyone over 40 will now be amused to note that the young folk are getting into vinyl. Good luck to them, but *we* own all the records. The only problem is finding a turntable to play them on.

This one serves three purposes. First off, it plays records (obviously), not 78s but 7 and 12in discs at 33 or 45rpm. Secondly, it converts the audio signal to digital, so you can connect the deck to your PC or Mac via USB and record into software of your choice (try Audacity, free from www.snipca.com/18231). Does this infringe copyright? Nobody knows: judges ruled in July against a new law that said it didn't. Whatever the truth, because this is a better-quality product than bog-standard USB turntables, the copies will be worth listening to.

Thirdly, it makes you look like a bona fide audiophile. The minimalist design isn't exactly practical. With no lid, it'll gather dust; while the belt, which you have to switch between pulleys to change speeds, can slip off. But it's all part of the vinyl experience, and the really fiddly bit, the tone arm and cartridge, comes set up for you. You'll need to attach powered speakers or a hi-fi to the phono sockets.

SPECIFICATIONS

MDF turntable (acrylic option at extra cost) • Ortofon OM 5E moving magnet cartridge • USB port • 2x phono sockets • 43x80x80mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18232

VERDICT: There are much cheaper ways to play and digitise records, but not with this much quality and fun

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE: Ion Max LP £79 Sound quality won't match up, but this is an attractive USB turntable with a dust cover and internal speakers

SCANNER | **£59** from Amazon www.snipca.com/18200

Canon CanoScan LiDE 220

A standalone scanner that still standing

Computer active GREAT PICK ★★★★☆

Remember when things didn't do everything? Your phone made phone calls, your camera took pictures and your pocket calculator did sums. Back then, you had a printer to get stuff out of your PC and a scanner to get stuff in. They were separate machines for a reason: a printer is nothing like a scanner. They don't share any parts.

Naturally, this total lack of similarity inspired manufacturers to bolt the two things together, and the resulting multi-function devices (MFDs) have taken over. The result is like the old joke where the police inspector issues a warning about 'cut and shut' car thieves from the wheel of his Vauxhall Fiesta. It's ridiculous and yet we've fallen for it.

> "It's compact, affordable, and while it's not super-quick the results are well worth waiting for"

MFDs can be handy, but their built-in scanners aren't always up to much, and if you already have a printer you don't want to buy both. So there's still a place for separate scanners, and here's one that's compact and affordable. Unlike more expensive models, it has no backlight, so you can't scan see-through materials. It's a pain to do, though, and there are more efficient little machines for those of us with boxes of 35mm slides to digitise.

The CanoScan LiDE 220 handles anything flat up to A4 size. You can scan with the lid open, but it can close even over fairly thick books. It's also possible to use the scanner on its side, if that helps. As usual, once you've installed the software you can scan directly from most image-handling programs. Resolution goes up to 4800 dots per inch – enough to blow up a postage stamp to twice A4 – and you can convert scanned text documents to editable word-processor files with reasonable accuracy.

The LiDE 220 took 15 seconds to get a preview, then the same to scan a full page at a fax-quality 150 dots per inch (dpi), or three more seconds for print-quality 300dpi. A standard 6x4in photo took 21 seconds at a sharp 600dpi and a minute and eight seconds at 1200dpi for 4x enlargement. That's not super-quick, but the results were worth waiting for, well focused and with accurate colours across a wide range.

VERDICT: For basic photocopier-type scanning there's nothing wrong with an MFD, but if you need better quality this fits the bill

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Canon CanoScan 9000F MkII £160 Buy this excellent multi-purpose A4 scanner if you need great results on everything, including transparencies

SPECIFICATIONS

4800dpi scanner • 48-bit colour depth (selectable) • Requires Windows XP or later or OS X 10.6 or later (Windows 10 and OS X 10.11 updates available) • 41x252x366mm (HxWxD) • 1.6kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/18203

COMING SOON

AUTUMN 2015

Huawei's Mate S smartphone is already on sale, but only the 128GB model (yet to arrive) will come with Force Touch. Confusingly, Apple also uses the term 'Force Touch'. It'll be interesting to see how Huawei's version measures up.

WINTER 2015

Google's Pixel C (£450), a 10.2in Android tablet, will be available before Christmas (a clip-on keyboard is optional). It looks promising, but Android doesn't yet have features like split-screen or as many advanced apps as Apple's iOS.

WINTER 2015

Asus' forthcoming VivoStick (around £100) joins the band of PCs that are so small they barely exist. It's a dongle that plugs into an HDMI port with Windows 10, 2GB of RAM, 32GB of storage, two USB 2.0 ports and a headphone jack.

WINTER 2015

Apple has added a 4K-resolution display option to its 21.5in iMac range (£899, www.snipca.com/18266), while the Asus Zen AiO S PC is available soon from £800. The latter offers more specifications and comes in two sizes with regular or 4K screens.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 11 Nov

Chillblast Fusion Drone
It doesn't fly, but it is an affordable desktop PC

Sony Xperia Z5 Compact
The antidote to huge phones

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Buy It

Find out what other products we liked in 2014. Buy our **Back Issue CD** (now only £12.58*): **www.snipca.com/14981** *At time of press

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

Asus X555LA-XX290H

£295 from www.snipca.com/18151
Tested: Issue 446

Asus has made all the right choices with this budget Windows 8.1 laptop. Its comfortable keyboard, fast performance, respectably lengthy battery life and bright screen are all the more impressive given its low price.

ALTERNATIVE Asus Chromebook C200 A cheap Chrome OS ultra-portable laptop with a bright screen, lengthy battery life and a great keyboard. £208 from www.snipca.com/17296

DESKTOP PC

PC Specialist Trion 960

£650 from www.snipca.com/17254
Tested: Issue 454

You could spend less on a usable PC, but this solid tower system has great all-round performance, including a decent Nvidia GTX 960 graphics card. A 120GB SSD and 1TB hard drive offers speed and space, but Wi-Fi costs £15 extra.

ALTERNATIVE: Palicomp Intel i5 Elite For £50 less, this is a similar PC in many respects, but compromises on graphics with the cheaper GTX 750 card. £600 from www.snipca.com/17297

TABLET

Apple iPad Mini 4

£319 from www.snipca.com/18100
Tested: Issue 460

The 2015 update to Apple's 7.9in tablet greatly improves the screen and camera, boosts performance, and makes it worth the £100 extra over the iPad mini 2 (still a good budget buy). Go for the £399 64GB version if you can, though.

ALTERNATIVE: Apple iPad Air 2 The 9.7in option is still slim and light, also has Touch ID and Apple Pay, and the range of apps beats Android. £399 from www.snipca.com/18139

PHONE

NEW ENTRY

Apple iPhone 6s

£539 from www.snipca.com/18240
Tested: Issue 461

It may look like last year's model, but this update is stronger and faster, with a higher-resolution camera, time-saving 3D Touch features and an excellent screen. The bigger 6s Plus has better battery life.

ALTERNATIVE: Moto X Play Motorola's fun phone may be plasticky but it runs Android 5 smoothly. The screen, camera and battery life are all big pluses. £270 from www.snipca.com/17934

DIGITAL CAMERA

Panasonic Lumix DMC-GF6

£285 from www.snipca.com/17548
Tested: Issue 405

This compact, interchangeable-lens camera is small and reasonably priced, yet it has well-designed controls, a wide range of available lenses and shoots excellent quality photos. The GF6 really is unbeatable value.

ALTERNATIVE: Sony A5000 A rival CSC with better low-light performance, although its controls and range of available lenses aren't quite as good. £249 from www.snipca.com/15854

E-READER

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite

£110 from www.snipca.com/17776
Tested: Issue 458

With a new high-resolution screen, the affordable Kindle lacks only automatic brightness adjustment and page-turn buttons (you have to swipe the screen). It's great value as long as you're happy to buy your books from Amazon.

ALTERNATIVE: Kobo Glo HD As good as the Paperwhite, but with more storage, and slightly more compact, this is the independent e-reader to pick. £110 from www.snipca.com/17889

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SECURITY SOFTWARE

Kaspersky Internet Security 2016

£19.99 from www.snipca.com/17874
Tested: Issue 437

Kaspersky Internet Security 2016 has won our past six antivirus tests. Compatible with Windows 10, the 2016 edition is available at an exclusive reader discount on our Software Store. Go to the link above for a one-device licence, or buy a three-device licence for just £39.99 at www.snipca.com/17903.

ALTERNATIVE: Avast Free Antivirus Almost as good as Kaspersky, but sometimes blocked legitimate software. Free from www.snipca.com/16493

PHOTO EDITING

Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 6

£104 from www.snipca.com/16952
Tested: Issue 453

Adobe's Photoshop is ideal for image manipulation, but Lightroom is the better choice for managing and tweaking photos. The first choice of professionals, it's easy for anyone to use, combining technical and artistic adjustments with rating, keywording and archiving.

ALTERNATIVE: Adobe CC Photography Plan Rather than buying Lightroom, you can subscribe for a reasonable £8.57 a month (paid annually) to use Lightroom and Photoshop www.snipca.com/17270

SMART TV

Samsung UE40H5500

£389 from www.snipca.com/18152
Tested: Issue 446

A 40in smart TV with great picture quality and apps for all the terrestrial TV catch-up services. It has plenty of extras too, such as recording to USB storage, playing media files stored on a NAS or USB stick and plenty of HDMI ports.

ALTERNATIVE: Sony KDL-43W755C Excellent image quality, stylish looks and a 43in screen. £470 from www.snipca.com/18153

PC MONITOR

Dell UltraSharp U2412M

£199 from www.snipca.com/15271
Tested: Issue 378

An exquisite monitor with superb image quality, an adjustable stand, a high resolution and even a built-in USB hub. It costs a little more than other monitors, but it's money well spent. It's easily the best value monitor we've seen and is the one by which all others are judged.

ALTERNATIVE: AOC i2360PHU A good quality budget 23in monitor that's easily adjustable and has a built-in USB 2.0 hub too. £134 from www.snipca.com/16706

ROUTER

Trendnet TEW-812DRU

£112 from www.snipca.com/15855
Tested: Issue 427

An incredibly fast 802.11ac router that's also one of the cheapest we've seen. It's superb and it's the router to buy if you're ready to make the jump to 802.11ac.

ALTERNATIVE: Linksys WRT1900AC More expensive, but even faster and with loads of features too. £170 from www.snipca.com/14950

NAS

Synology DiskStation DS215j

£134 from www.snipca.com/16187
Tested: Issue 449

This two-drive NAS enclosure has it all – fast performance, easy configuration and plenty of extra features. Its only flaw is that installation is a little fiddly – but if you want quality network storage, then this is the obvious choice.

ALTERNATIVE: Synology DS414j A four-drive NAS that's generally fast, easy to set up and use. £243 from www.snipca.com/16707

HOMEPLUGS

Devolo dLAN 1200 Triple+ Starter Kit

£119 from www.snipca.com/15369
Tested: Issue 444

Devolo's latest HomePlug adapters are the fastest we've ever seen. They're also well designed too, with a passthrough socket so you can still power another device and the design should avoid skirting boards and other obstacles.

ALTERNATIVE: D-Link PowerLine AV2 1000HD Gigabit Starter Kit Fast (speeds of up to 1000Mbps), much cheaper and very easy to set up, but the lack of a passthrough socket is frustrating. £47 from www.snipca.com/17836

WEB-DESIGN

Xara Web Designer Premium 11

£70 from www.snipca.com/16955
Tested: Issue 453

This visual web-design program makes creating sites more like laying out a document than writing HTML code, and sites can be 'responsive', meaning they look right on both big and small screens without extra work. A basic version is also available for half the price.

ALTERNATIVE: Serif WebPlus X8 Comes with lots of templates, but creates separate desktop and mobile versions instead of responsive sites, and can be slow to use. £40 from www.snipca.com/14964

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 6 **Gramofon Wi-Fi music players**

Winner of a five-star 'Buy It!' award in Issue 460, the Gramofon is a beautifully made cuboid that has one simple purpose: to get music from the internet and play it in your house. It comes with Spotify Connect, which lets you send music straight from Spotify's servers to any compatible device. It all works over Wi-Fi, giving you better sound quality than Bluetooth. To enter, email your address to cacomp@dennis.co.uk with 'gramofon' in the subject line, by midnight 11 November.

The **Gramofon** costs £44 from www.gramofon.com. For updates on Gramofon follow @gramofonmusic on Twitter and 'like' www.facebook.com/gramofonmusic.

MULTIFUNCTION PRINTER

Canon Pixma MG6650

£76 from www.snipca.com/17334
Tested: Issue 455

It may look like something that James Bond would have to defuse, but this low-cost, all-in-one printer is an excellent choice. Running costs are reasonable too – buy the XL cartridges and running costs work out at 7.7p per colour page or 2.4p for black and white. This makes it very affordable to run.

ALTERNATIVE: Canon Pixma MX495 It's slow, and black ink is pricey, but this cheaper MFP has a paper feeder and fax too. £40 from www.snipca.com/17174

SOLID-STATE DRIVES

Crucial BX100 1TB

£230 from www.snipca.com/16017
Tested: Issue 445

A blindingly fast, high-capacity SSD at a lower price than ever before. If you've been put off buying a SSD because of the cost, then now is finally the time to take the plunge.

ALTERNATIVE: Samsung 850 Pro 256GB An even faster SSD, but it is much more expensive per gigabyte. £110 from www.snipca.com/16498

SECURITY CAMERA

Y-cam HomeMonitor HD

£135 from www.snipca.com/11646
Tested: Issue 420

A home-security camera that's well priced and easy to set up. Plus, it has great picture quality, useful apps and there's no need to subscribe to any extra services. It's a worthy successor to the original HomeMonitor, our previous favourite security camera.

ALTERNATIVE: D-Link Wireless N Day & Night Camera A good-value security camera with excellent night vision. £88 from www.snipca.com/15275

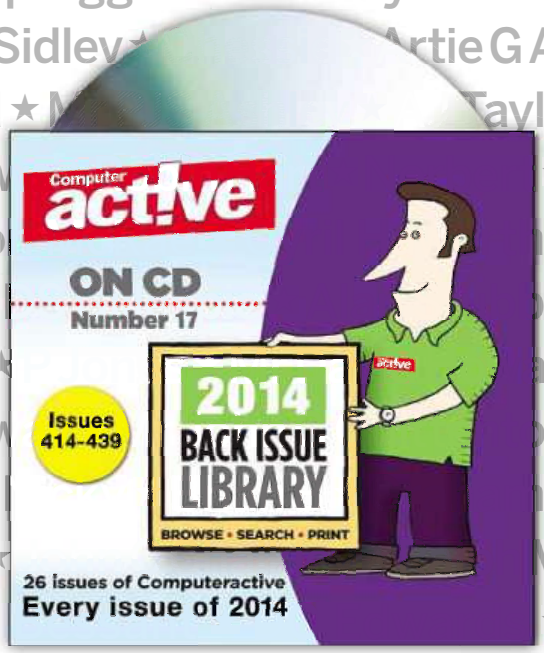
Computer active

Thank You!

★★★★★

We want to say a special thank you to everyone who has given our 2014 Back Issue CD a five-star review on Amazon. That includes...

El Jay "Len" ★ ColChris ★ Mr I Pimlott ★ Bill Daniels1973 ★ Lizzy ★ Dave Harper ★ Sproggit ★ Mr K Meyler ★ Enid ★ MalcolmW ★ A Watt ★ John B ★ Sidley ★ Artie G Artie ★ John Smith ★ Mr A McParland ★ M Taylor ★ P Campbell ★ Ali252 ★ P Matthew ★ Stewart Awbery ★ D Ward ★ Gordo ★ Alan Thomas ★ Stephen Szeles ★ s ★ Mr Rh M Urray ★ Susan Pearson ★ t ★ Stupot ★ Mrs D Long ★ MA Hathaw n ★ Rodney Driver ★ Ms JI Aldridge ★ Deane ★ Colin Z ★ Alan R Marchant ★ Moore ★ Frederick Scott ★ Leighton ★ Martin Perman ★ Maurice McCullough ★ Joe Atkinson ★ Peter Dowsett ★ Michael Kelly ★ David Nelson ★ John H ★ K Harrison ★ Anthony Broom ★ Leslie John Bell ★ Clive Reynolds ★ Andreos Greco



Thanks for all your kind words – we really appreciate it. And thanks in advance to everyone who posts a review.

Our 2014 Back Issue CD is still on sale on Amazon:
www.snipca.com/14981 (or search for 'computeractive cd').
It costs £15, but Amazon often discounts this to around £12.

You can also buy the 2013 CD at www.snipca.com/16010.

Workshops & Tips

Edited by Sherwin Coelho

14 pages of easy-to-follow workshops and expert tips

35 Control CCleaner from the web
38 Add tabs to Windows Explorer
40 Make Google Earth work in Windows 10
42 Find out what's crashing your PC

PLUS
43 Readers' Tips
44 Phone & Tablet Tips
46 Make Windows Better
47 Make Office Better
48 Secret Tips For... NirLauncher

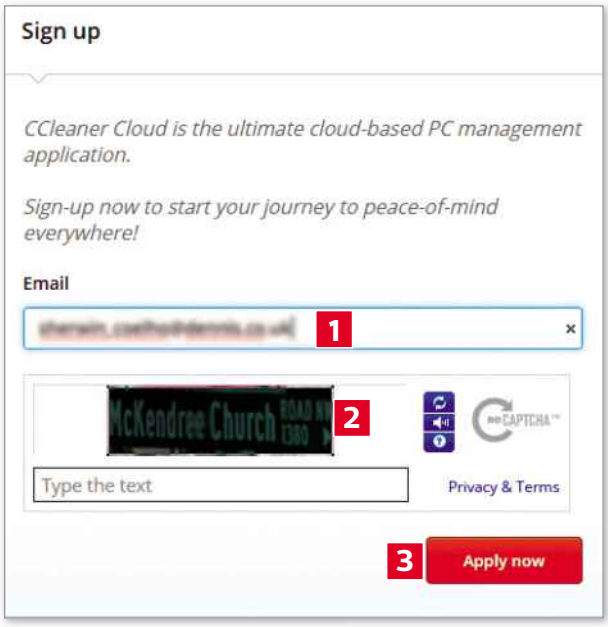
Control CCleaner from the web

What you need: CCleaner Cloud, any version of Windows (XP to 10)
Time required: 1 hour

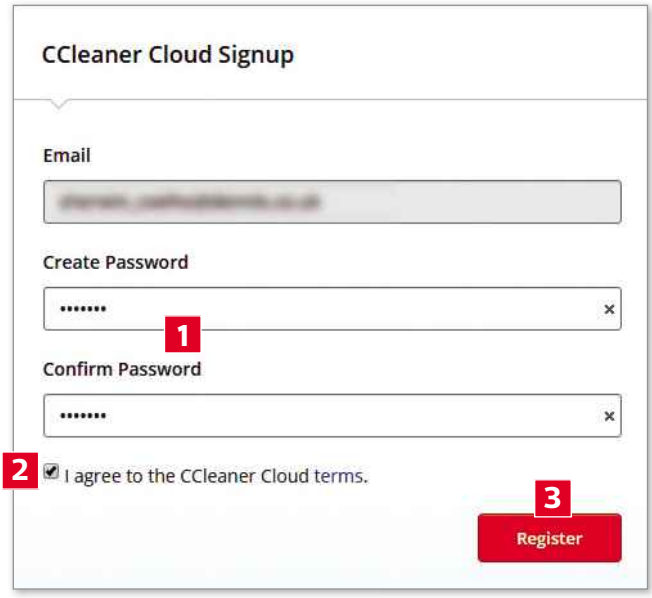
British software company Piriform is most famous for its PC-optimisation program CCleaner, but it also makes Speccy (which lets you see detailed information about your PC) and Defraggler (which lets you defragment your drives).

The company's new, free program CCleaner Cloud lets you remotely control each of these programs on up to three PCs using any browser (provided they are online). This means you can see vital information about each PC, uninstall unwanted programs and run CCleaner on any other PC wherever you are.

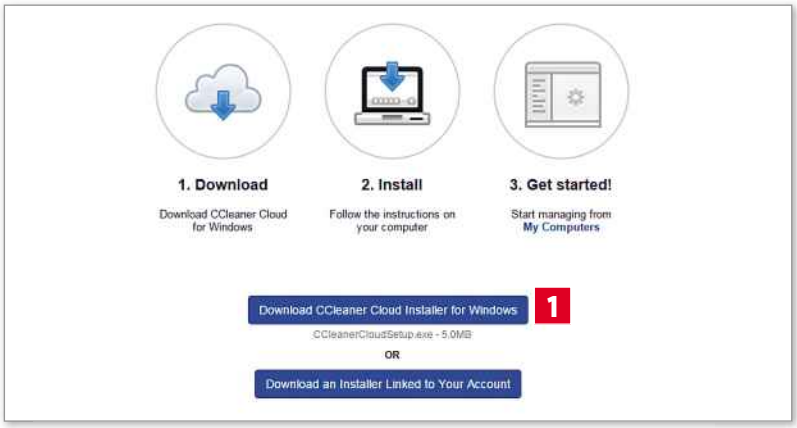
STEP 1 You don't need to install CCleaner, Speccy or Defraggler on any of your PCs. You only need to install CCleaner Cloud on your PCs, after which you can carry out actions on them remotely from any other PC via the web. To install CCleaner Cloud on the first PC, go to www.ccleaner.com and click the orange Sign Up button below the Free plan. Now enter your email address 1, type the (Captcha) text 2, then click 'Apply now' 3. You'll see a message informing you that an invitation will be emailed to you within the next 24 hours (we received it within 10 minutes).

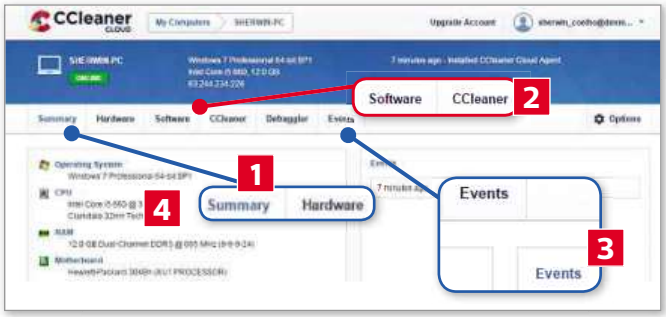


STEP 2 Click the link within the email to open a web page where you'll be prompted to create then confirm a password 1. Tick the T&C box 2, then click Register 3. Next, click 'Download CCleaner Cloud Installer for Windows'. Click the downloaded setup file, Yes, then Install. Now select 'I have a CCleaner Cloud account', click Next, enter your login details and click Login. You'll now see a blue CCleaner Cloud icon in your System Tray. Double-click it to open the CCleaner Cloud website (www.snipca.com/18188 – you'll need to re-enter your login details, then click Login). You'll now see your PC listed next to a green Online button.

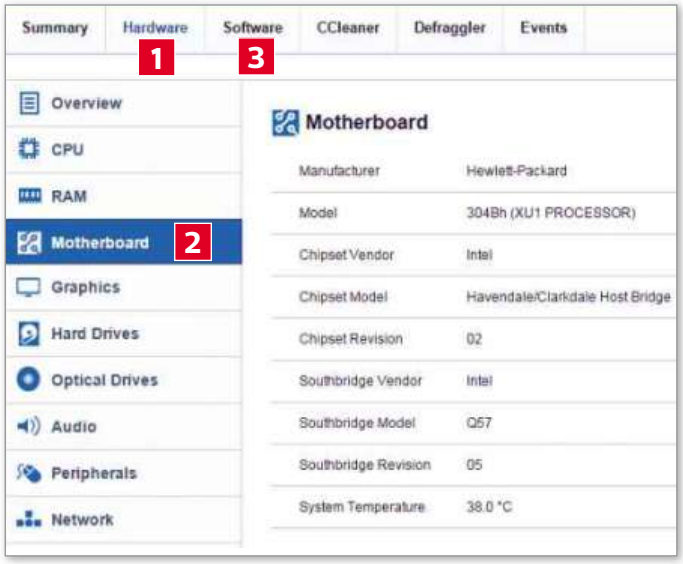


STEP 3 If you plan to use CCleaner Cloud with only one PC, skip to Step 4. To add a second PC to your account, go to www.snipca.com/18187 on that particular PC, log into your CCleaner Cloud account, click the blue 'Download CCleaner Cloud Installer for Windows' button 1, then follow the process outlined in Step 2. You can add a maximum of three PCs using the free version of CCleaner Cloud.



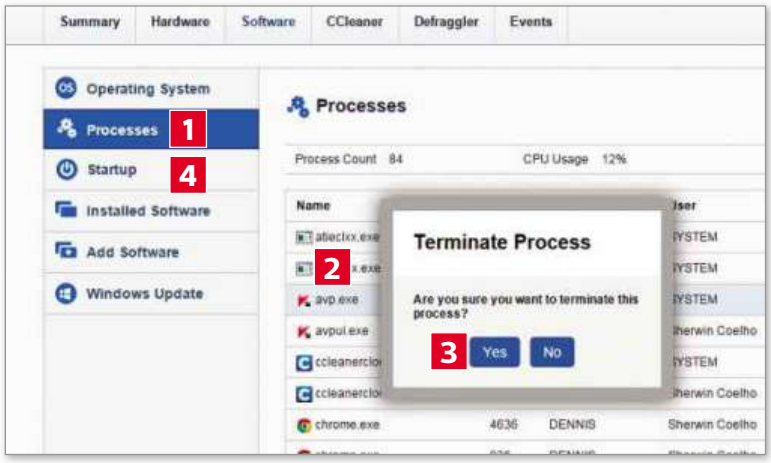


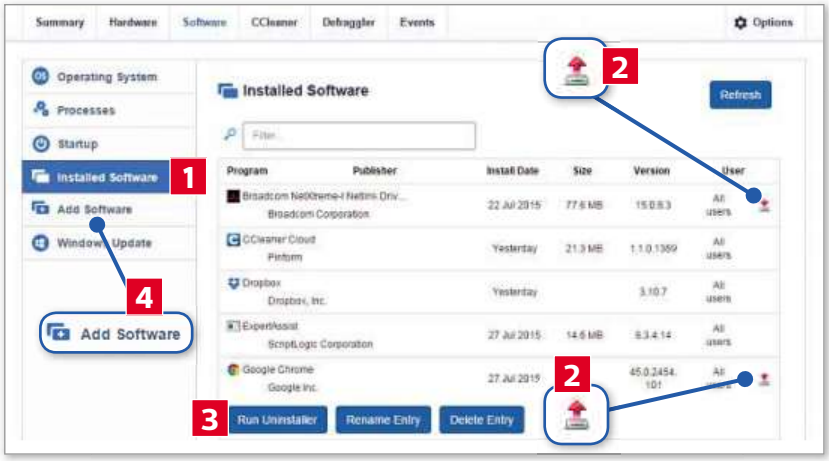
STEP 4 Whenever you want to perform actions remotely on any of the added PCs, ensure that they are online. Then go to www.snipca.com/18188 on any other PC and log into your account. You'll see icons for all your connected PCs. Click the green Online button below the one you want to access and you'll see six tabs. In the first two tabs (Summary and Hardware 1) you can access Speccy's tools; the next two tabs (Software and CCleaner 2) contain CCleaner's tools; and the fifth tab is where you access Defraggler's tools. The final tab (Events) 3 lists actions you've performed using CCleaner Cloud. Within the Summary tab you'll see four sections. The one at the top left contains general info about your operating system, CPU, RAM and motherboard 4. The bottom left section in this tab contains four links that let you monitor your PC's network usage, memory, CPU and background processes. The bottom right section displays as a percentage the free space available on your drives.



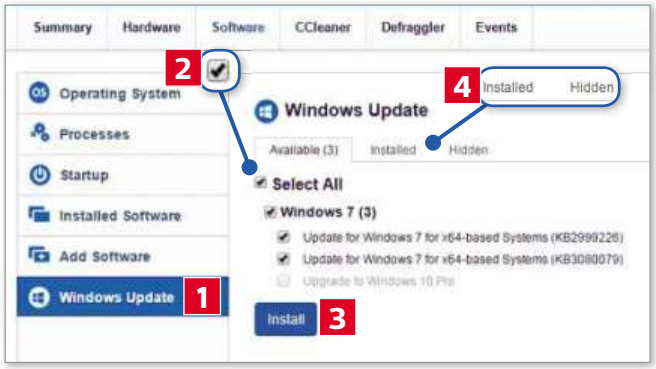
STEP 5 Click the Hardware tab 1 to see detailed information about the PC components listed on the left 2. This is useful if, for example, a particular component isn't working and you want advice on the best replacement. Next, click the Software tab 3, which opens in the Operating System section. You'll see a list of PC security programs (including your antivirus, Windows Firewall and Windows Defender). Click their dropdown menus to see info about their status (Enabled or Disabled).

STEP 6 We'll now show you how to control aspects of your PC remotely over the web. Click the Processes section 1 to see a list of all your PC's running processes 2. This is great way to remotely monitor which PC programs are being used. To terminate a process, simply right-click it, click Terminate Process, then Yes 3. The Startup section 4 displays a list of items that launch with your PC and extensions enabled in each of your browsers. The process to disable or delete a startup item or an extension is the same. Simply click the tab (Windows or Chrome, for example) at the top, select the relevant item/extension, then click Disable or Delete.

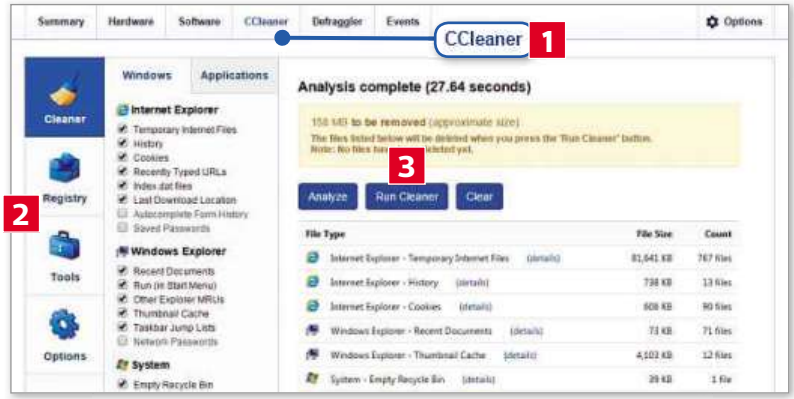




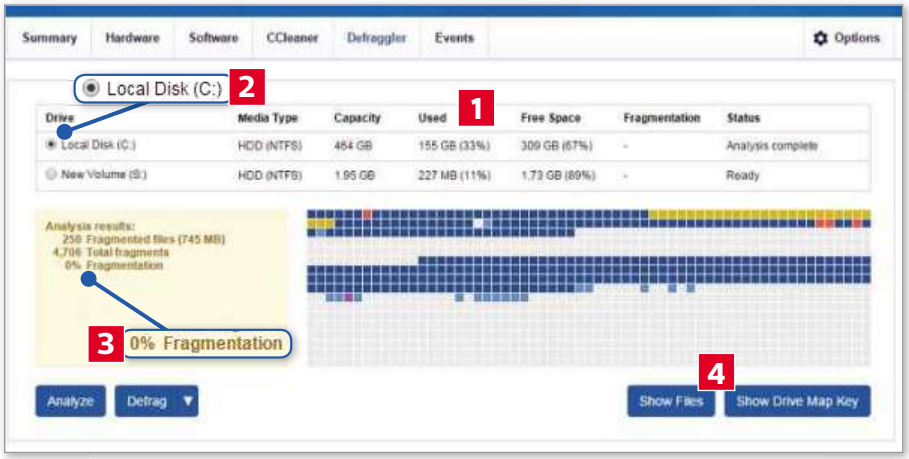
STEP 7 You can also remotely uninstall programs and install 10 of the most popular ones. To uninstall a program, click Installed Software 1 for a list of all the programs on your PC. Some programs display a small icon 2, indicating they can be uninstalled without requiring any permission prompts from the remote PC. To uninstall one of these programs, click it, click Run Uninstaller 3, then Yes. Click Add Software 4 to see the list of 10 programs (including 7Zip, Skype, VLC, Chrome and Firefox) that you can remotely install. Click the one you want, then click Yes to install it.



STEP 8 Windows Update 1 lists any pending updates on your PC. Tick Select All 2, then click Install 3. If your PC needs to reboot after installing the updates, you can select how long after installation you want the reboot to take place using the 'Reboot options' dropdown menu (the four options range from 'Immediately after installation' to 'After 4 hours'). Select the one you want, then click 'Install and Reboot'. You'll see the installation progress as a percentage. The Installed and Hidden tabs 4 list those updates.



STEP 9 Now click the CCleaner tab 1 to see four sections 2. Click Analyze, then Run Cleaner 3 to clean up your PC. Likewise, you can clean your remote PC's registry via the Registry section. The Tools section has only two options: system restore and drive wiper.



STEP 10 Click the Defraggler tab to see a summary of your remote PC's drives, including free and used space as percentages 1. Simply select the drive 2 you want to defragment, click Analyze and wait for the analysis to complete. If the Fragmentation score is above 30 per cent 3, we recommend clicking the Defrag button at the bottom to free up space on that drive. Select your other drives and repeat this process. Click the buttons at the bottom 4 to see which files leave fragments behind and to see what the coloured boxes on the grid represent.

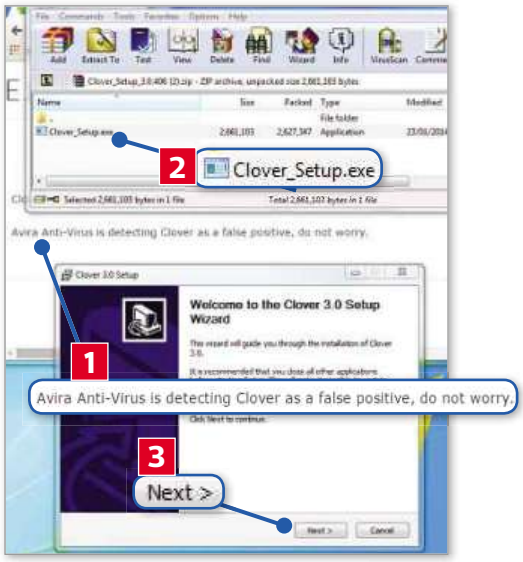
Next issue... discover which boxes to tick in CCleaner

Add tabs to Windows Explorer

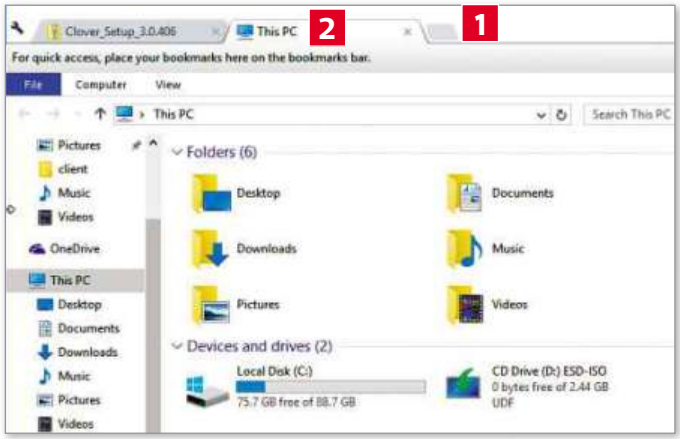
What you need: Clover; Any version of Windows (XP to 10)
Time required: 20 minutes

One of the most requested features from users of the Windows 10 Technical Preview was the addition of tabs to the File Explorer window, providing access to different locations on your PC. So far, Microsoft haven't heeded this feedback. However, free program Clover brings these Windows/File Explorer tabs to any version of Microsoft's operating system. If you've ever used Chrome, you'll notice a similarity between Clover and Google's browser, with tabs to open and access multiple locations from one window.

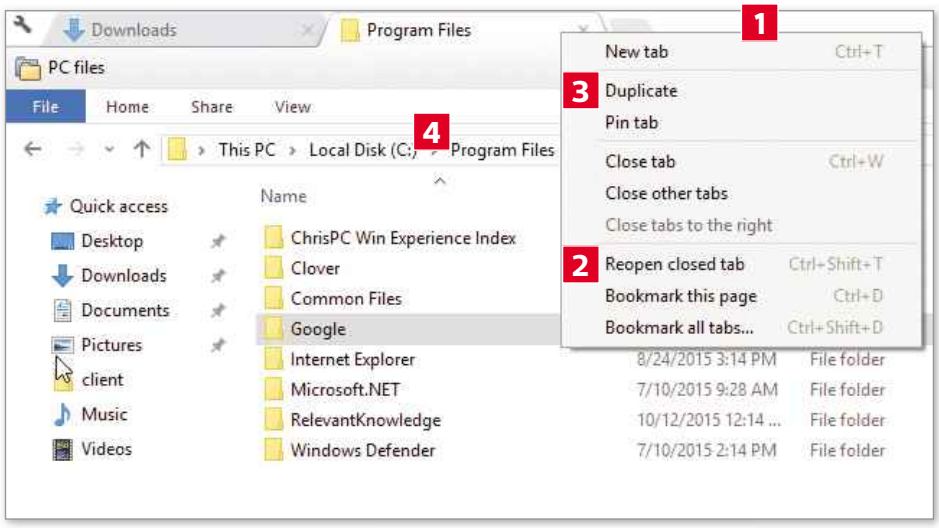
STEP 1 The latest version (3) of Clover, developed by Chinese company Ejie Technology, is perfectly safe and doesn't sneak in annoying extras during installation. To download it, go to www.ejie.me and click the black Free Download button. You will notice that Avira Antivirus detects Clover as a false positive during installation 1. Click to open the downloaded zipped file, click the setup file 2, Yes, Next 3, then Install.

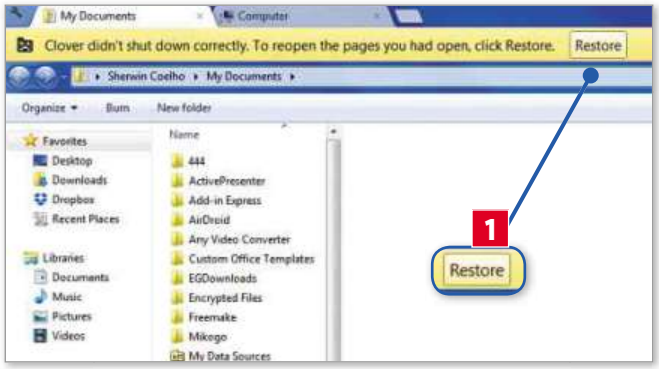


STEP 2 The program works perfectly on Windows 10 (even if the website doesn't list it under system requirements). You'll see a new Windows/File Explorer (WFE) window as soon as it installs. This has a Chrome-like interface, with tabs at the top. Click the 'New tab' button 1 to open further tabs. By default, this opens in Computer/This PC 2.



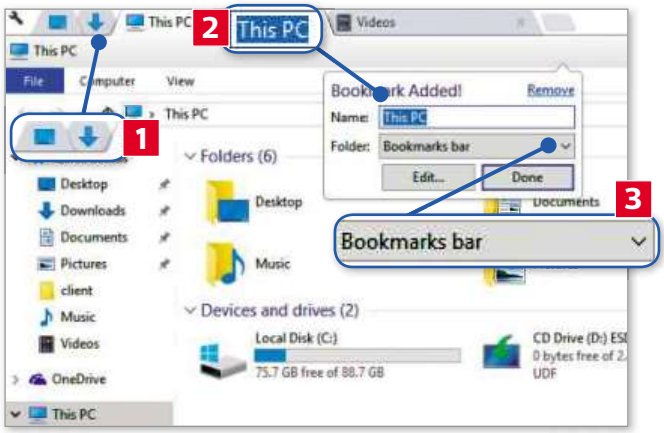
STEP 3 Right-click any tab to see a contextual menu 1. Here, you can reopen the tab you most recently closed 2 (useful if you closed one by mistake) and duplicate a tab 3 (opening the same location in a new tab). You can also copy any WFE location path 4 from one tab (similar to copying your browser's URL) and paste it into another to open the same location there. You can also drag tabs to the left or right to reposition them and even drag a tab completely out of the window to open it in a separate window.



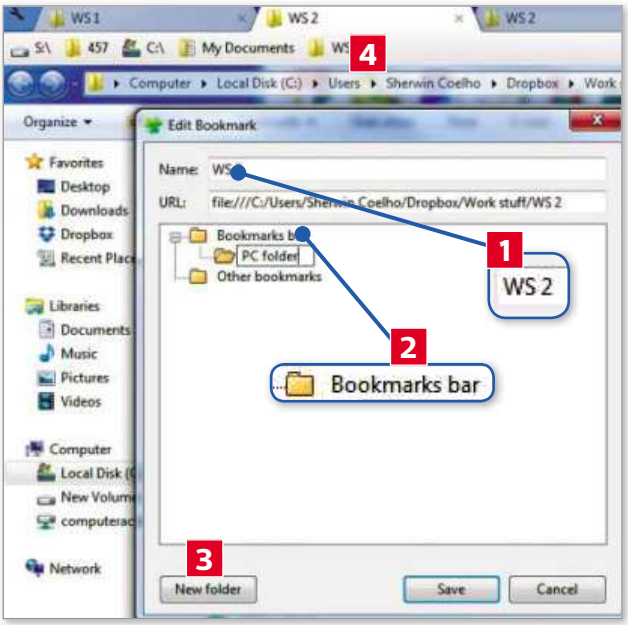


STEP 4 There are keyboard shortcuts that work in all browsers and the most common of these also work with Clover. For example, press Ctrl+T to open a new tab, Ctrl+W to close your current tab and Ctrl+Tab to switch between tabs. If you use a mouse with a scroll wheel or middle button, then simply move your cursor to the tab and click either of those to close the tab you're currently in. Also, like Chrome, any time the program closes unexpectedly (your PC crashes, for example), you'll see the option to restore tabs from your last session 1 when you open it.

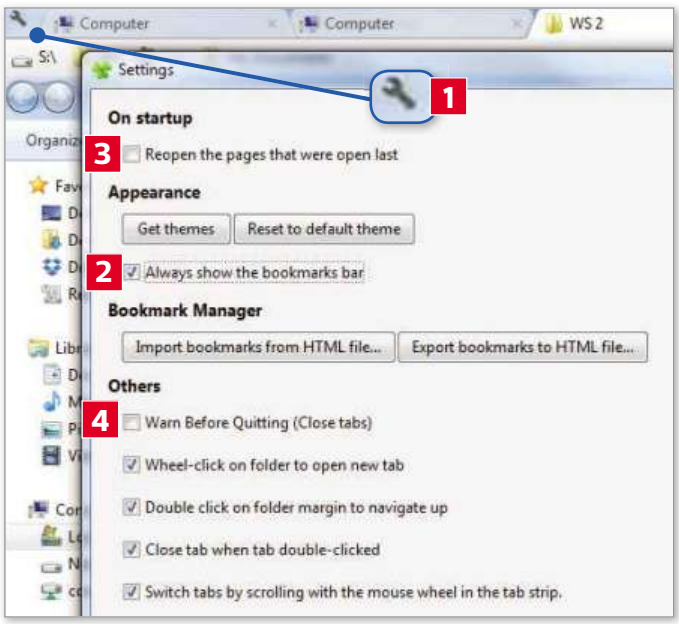
STEP 5 If there's a particular folder or drive you access often, you can pin it to Clover's tabbed menu. Much like pinning website tabs in Chrome or Firefox, these location tabs will sit at the left of your tabbed menu 1 (right-click any pinned tab for options to unpin it). You can also 'bookmark' locations on your PC. There are two ways to do this: right-click the tab and click 'Bookmark this page' or use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+D. You'll see a small menu with options to rename the bookmark 2 and save it within a folder 3.



STEP 6 For more options bookmarking a PC location, click the Edit button. You can rename the location 1 and create subfolders within the default 'Bookmarks bar' folder where you can save bookmarks. To do this, click 'Bookmarks bar' 2, 'New folder' 3, rename the folder, then click Save. Sub-folders appear as an option on your bookmarks bar. If you have multiple locations saved to a sub-folder, they will appear as a dropdown menu when you click the sub-folder option (on your bookmarks bar). Drag your bookmarks to the left or right 4 to reposition them.



STEP 7 The quickest way to reveal/hide Clover's bookmarks bar is by pressing Ctrl+Shift+B. Alternatively, click the Customise icon 1, move your cursor to Bookmarks, then click 'Show/hide bookmarks bar'. To permanently keep the bookmarks bar in view, click the Customise icon, Settings, then tick 'Always show the bookmarks bar' 2. Here, you'll see the option to always reopen Clover using the location tabs you most recently closed 3. You can also choose to see a pop-up alert whenever you close Clover (to warn you that you're about to close all your WFE tabs) 4. ●

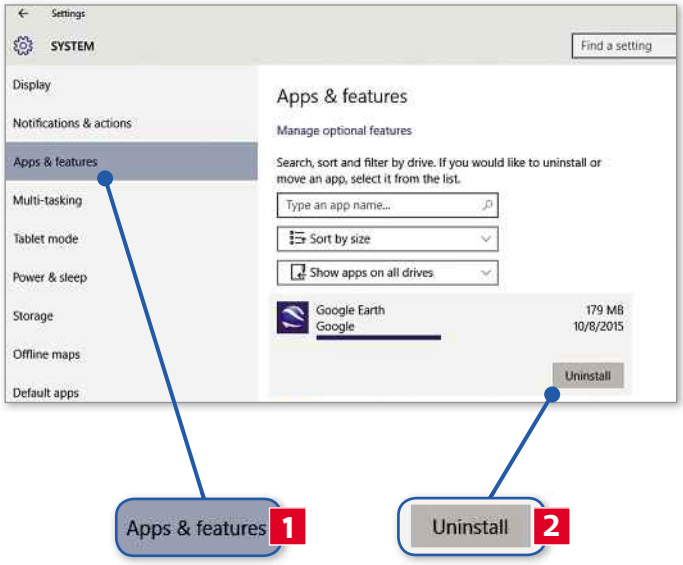


Make Google Earth work in Windows 10

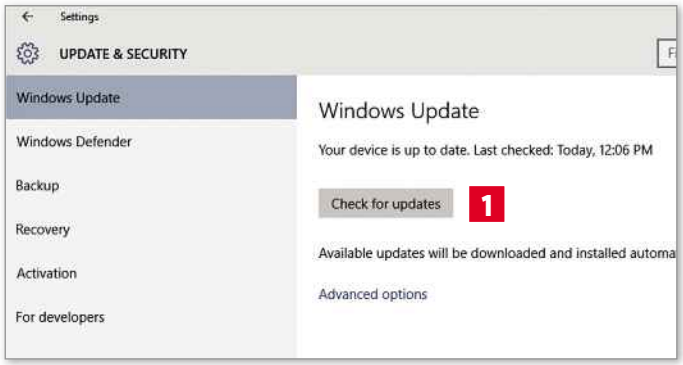
What you need: Windows 10; Google Earth Pro **Time required:** 25 minutes

While some readers have reported a smooth transition to Windows 10, others have experienced difficulties when it comes to running certain programs, especially Google Earth Pro. Although the Google Earth website doesn't list Windows 10 in its 'System requirements', you *can* run it on your upgraded PC. As with many Windows 10 problems, you can make Google Earth run simply by updating Windows or by tweaking a few settings, as we explain below.

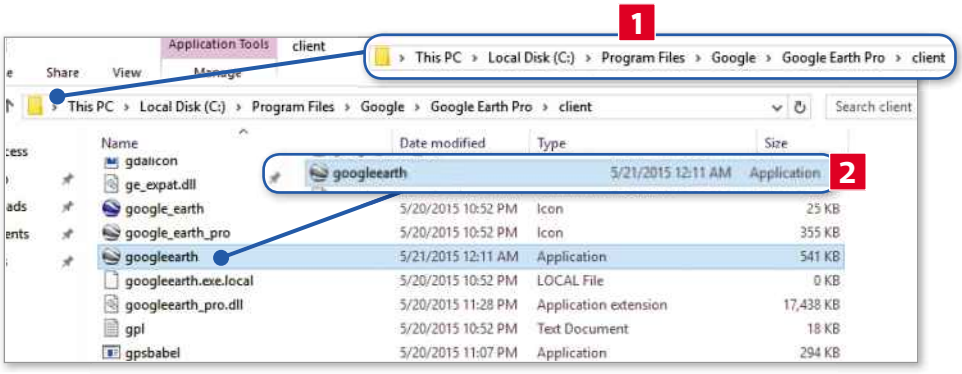
STEP 1 If you haven't installed Google Earth Pro yet, go to Step 2. If you have already downloaded the program but are experiencing problems installing or running it, then uninstall it. We'll show you how to reinstall it properly. To do that in Windows 10, open the Start menu, click Settings, System, then click 'Apps & features' 1. Click Google Earth in the list of apps, then the Uninstall button 2. Click Uninstall and Yes to confirm.

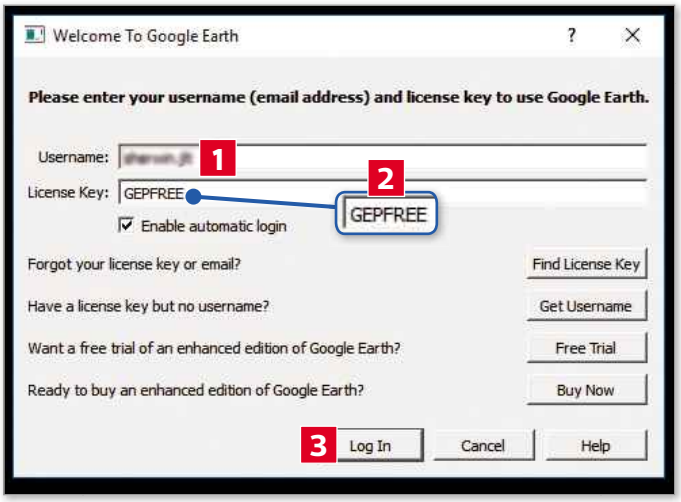


STEP 2 Before installing Google Earth Pro, you should first ensure Windows 10 is updated. To do this, open the Start menu, click Settings, 'Update & security', then click the 'Check for updates' button 1. If you see any pending updates, click 'Install now'. By default, your PC will apply the installed updates automatically the next time you shut down. But click the 'Restart now' button at the bottom to force it to apply the latest updates, after which your PC will restart.

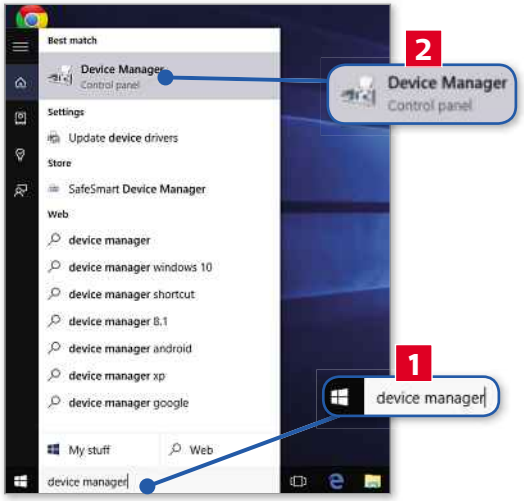


STEP 3 To download Google Earth Pro, go to www.snipca.com/18194 and click the blue 'Agree and Download' button. Now click the downloaded setup file, Yes, then wait for it to install. If it installs without problems, skip to Step 4. If you see a message 'The installer encountered error 1603: Fatal error during installation', don't worry. Error 1603 basically means you already have Google Earth Pro installed on your PC, which is why you can't reinstall it. Simply navigate through these folders: C Drive, Program Files, Google, Google Earth (or Google Earth Pro), followed by the 'client' folder 1. Now click the 'googleearth' Application file 2 to launch the program.

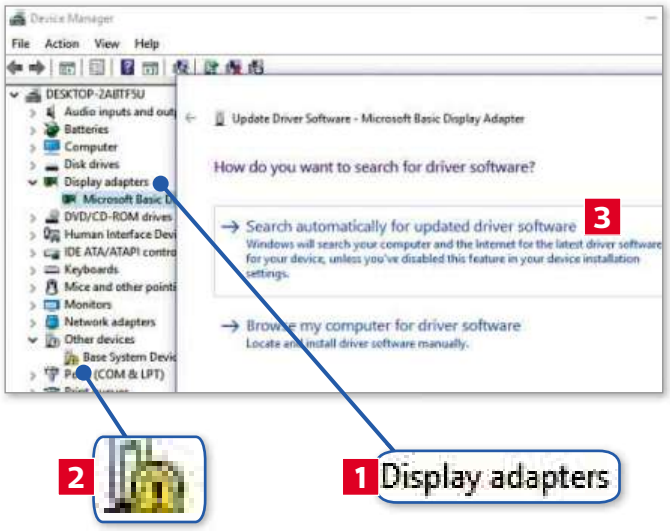




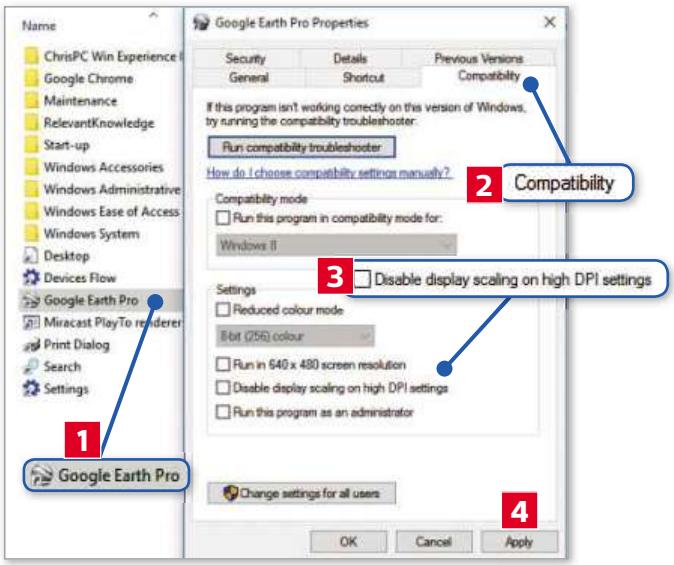
STEP 4 When it launches, you'll be prompted to enter a username and licence key, which is required to use Google Earth Pro for free. Type your Gmail account username in the first field 1 and GEPFREE in the second 2, then click Log In 3. The program will now open. Close the 'Navigating in Google Earth' (tips) window that opens, click the 'Sign in' button at the top right and log in with your Google account. If you've used the program before, then it may take a little while to load properly because it updates any information you've previously added to your Google Earth account.



STEP 5 This is the point where Google Earth Pro tends to crash on many Windows 10 PCs. The most common reason for crashes is outdated display drivers. Although most common display drivers are updated when you update your PC, you could be using a specific driver that needs to be updated manually. Simply type device manager in the search bar at the bottom 1, then press Enter to open the Device Manager option 2. You'll see a list of all your PC's components with dropdown menus.

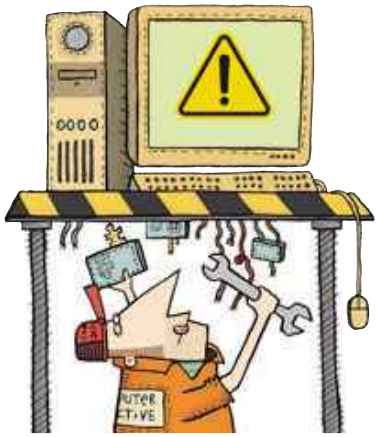


STEP 6 Click the dropdown menu beside any components containing the words Display 1, Graphics or Monitor to reveal their drivers. A yellow exclamation mark 2 indicates that a driver is not up to date. To update, simply right-click it, click Update Driver Software, then 'Search automatically for updated driver software' 3. If Windows can't find it, it'll tell you to go to the manufacturer's website and install it from there. Type the name of the driver (exactly as it appears in the Device Manager) into Google and you should be directed to the relevant page from where you can download its latest version. This useful Microsoft page www.snipca.com/18198 contains more info about updating drivers.



STEP 7 Another common Google Earth error message is: 'Your desktop resolution is set to smaller than 1024x768', which is the minimum screen resolution the program needs to work. To fix this, open your Start menu, right-click Google Earth Pro (in the Recently Added column), then click 'Open file location'. Now right-click Google Earth Pro in the list 1 and click Properties. Next, click the Compatibility tab 2, untick 'Disable display scaling on high DPI settings' 3, click Apply 4, then OK. Relaunch the program and it should work properly. If you encounter any problems with Google Earth not covered here, visit Google's 'Google Maps and Earth Help Forum' for Windows 10 (www.snipca.com/18199). ●

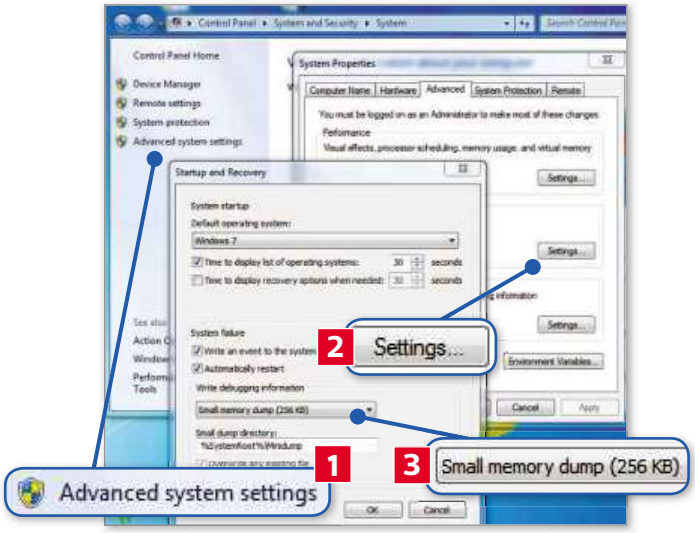
Find out what's crashing your PC



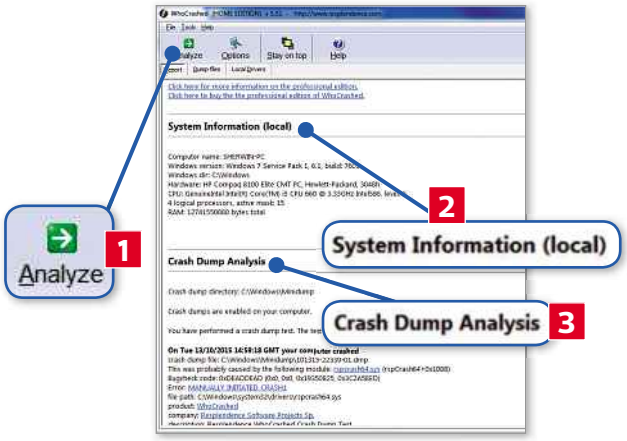
What you need: WhoCrashed; Any version of Windows (XP to 10) **Time required:** 15 minutes

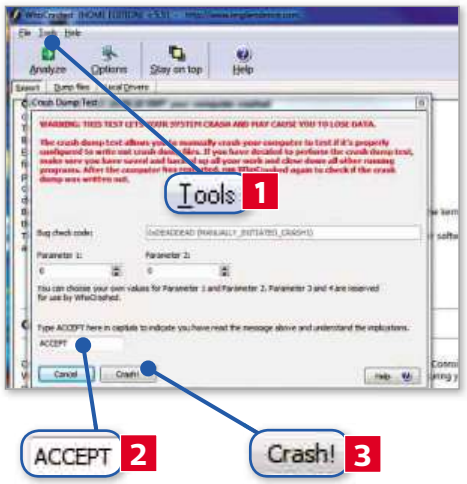
Whenever your PC crashes, your first thought might be adware or malware, but the cause may be something less obvious. After each crash your PC saves a log of the event to its memory, but unless you're a tech expert, you'll struggle to locate and interpret this. Thankfully, the free program WhoCrashed does this for you. It lists all your crash events and tells you which driver, program or malware caused each one. It won't suggest fixes, but we've provided a few below.

STEP 1 Before installing the program, you should make sure your PC stores crash/memory dumps (logs of crash errors). To confirm this, right-click Computer, click Properties, then click the 'Advanced system settings' link 1. Now click Settings 2 below 'Startup and Recovery' and ensure the 'Write debugging information' dropdown menu is set to 'Complete/Full memory dump'. If you don't see these options, select 'Small memory dump' 3, then click OK.



STEP 2 To download WhoCrashed, go to www.snipca.com/18245, scroll to the Crash Analysis Tools section, then click WhoCrashed 5.51 (the latest version at the time of writing). Download and run the setup file, then click Finish to launch it. Now click Analyze 1. After a few seconds, you'll see three sections on the main screen. System Information (local) 2 contains information about your PC, operating system and hardware. Crash Dump Analysis 3 lists each crash event and what caused it. If it's a faulty driver, program or malware, you'll see it listed (along with the company behind it). The final section (Conclusion) gives you a short crash summary.





STEP 3 The WhoCrashed troubleshooting page (www.snipca.com/18246) lists some of the most common causes of crashes, including failing to update your version of Windows and your PC's drivers. To update your Windows 10 PC, see Step 2 on page 40. To update your drivers for any version of Windows, see Step 5 on page 41. You can deliberately crash your PC using WhoCrashed to check whether your PC is storing crash dumps properly. Before doing this, close any open programs. Now click Tools 1, then Crash Dump Test. Type ACCEPT in the field below 2, then click Crash 3. After restarting your PC, repeat Step 2 (after the download instructions). If all is working well, you'll see information in the second and third sections indicating WhoCrashed as the crash culprit.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 11 Nov

- Use just one password for accounts
- Make your own DVD menus
- Use Windows Desktop gadgets safely
- Switch from AVG to Avast

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Readers' Tips

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TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Integrate Dropbox with Gmail

I've had a Gmail account for years, use Chrome as my default browser and Dropbox as my PC's cloud-storage service. A few months back, Google let Gmail users attach and save files from and to Google Drive, but that wasn't of much use to me. Thankfully, they've now introduced the same feature for Dropbox and you can set it up in minutes using Chrome.

Click the Dropbox icon in your PC's System Tray, then the new Enable button below 'Introducing Gmail integration'. Chrome will open and you'll need to log into your Dropbox account. Now click the 'Add extension' button to add the 'Dropbox for Gmail' extension, then log into your Gmail account.

From now on whenever you compose a new email, you'll see a Dropbox icon at the bottom (beside the Send button). Click it to see a list of your recently saved Dropbox files (see screenshot). Click the Files option on the left to see your Dropbox account folders exactly as they appear on your PC, while Photos displays all your photos organised by date. Tick to select the ones you want to attach to your email, then click the Insert Links button to do that.

Similarly, you can also save email attachments to Dropbox. To do that open the email whose attachments you want to save, move your cursor over the attached file and click the Dropbox icon. These attachments are saved to a new Dropbox folder called Saves. My son emails me photos of my little grandson, so that folder has quickly been filled with a lot of happy memories.

Ben Isaacs

The winner of every Tip of the Fortnight wins this exclusive Computeractive mug!

ADD-ON

Add better fonts to Google Docs

While moving house, I found a box of poems I'd written at university and I wanted to type and print them. Sadly, neither Word nor Google Docs had the fonts I wanted. A friend told me you can add extensions to Google Docs, just as you can to Chrome. After a little searching, I found a brilliant extension called Extensis Fonts that had just the typefaces I was after.

Go to docs.google.com and log in with your Gmail account. Click the Blank tile to open a new document, then click the Add-ons tab and click 'Get add-ons'. In the search bar, type extensis fonts, then press Enter. Now click the Free button, then Allow to add the extension. Click the Add-ons tab again, move your cursor to Extensis Fonts, then click Start. A new menu will slide in from the right with two dropdown menus (see screenshot right) – the first lets you sort out your fonts by type (Handwriting, Serif, Sans Serif) and the second lets you sort them alphabetically, and by popularity, 'trending' or new additions.

Dale Holmes

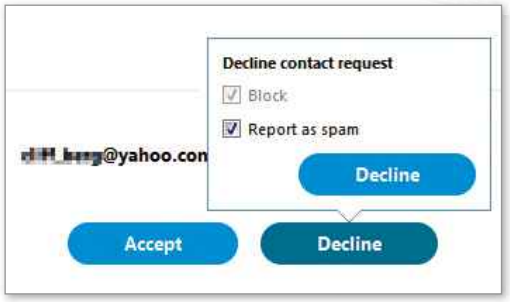
PC OPTIMISATION

Make your PC boot faster

I'd like to thank Ben Wilson for his useful tip on how to retrieve forgotten web-based email passwords (Readers' Tips, Issue 458). While browsing that program's website (www.sterjosoft.com), I came across another free program by its parent company. SterJo Startup Patrol makes your PC boot faster by killing unwanted programs that load with it.

What impressed me about this program is that – unlike other programs that display all your start-up items (including those by Microsoft that are unsafe to disable) - SterJo Startup Patrol only displays third-party programs, which can all be safely disabled. I've left my antivirus program running but have disabled all others, including browsers and photo-editing and cloud-storage programs. To disable them, just right-click the item in the list, then click Disable Selected Item. My PC's start-up time has now decreased by three minutes.

Alan Blackman



SKYPE SECURITY

Block and report spam Skype contacts

I was recently a victim of Skype spam – unknown people sending me contact requests, then repeatedly re-sending these every time I declined them. I'm relieved that the latest version of Skype has an option to permanently block and report these spam contacts.

To update the program, click Help at the top, then 'Check for Updates'. If there's one pending, click Download, then Upgrade to restart Skype. Depending on how old your Skype version was, you may have to manually go through the setup. Untick the Bing and MSN boxes (to prevent changes to search engine and home page). When Skype starts, click the annoying contact that's added you, then click Decline to see boxes to block and report them as spam (see screenshot above).

Lawrence Dixon

Phone and Tablet Tips

Brilliant things to do on your device

ANDROID

Make a phone call using Google Now

One of Google Now's lesser-known features is the ability to make a phone call using a voice command. Simply open the app (the circular white icon with a multi-coloured 'G' logo), tap the mic icon, then say, for example, 'Call Kevin' (inserting your contact's name). Even more impressively, you can say 'Call Kevin on speakerphone' to initiate a hands-free call.

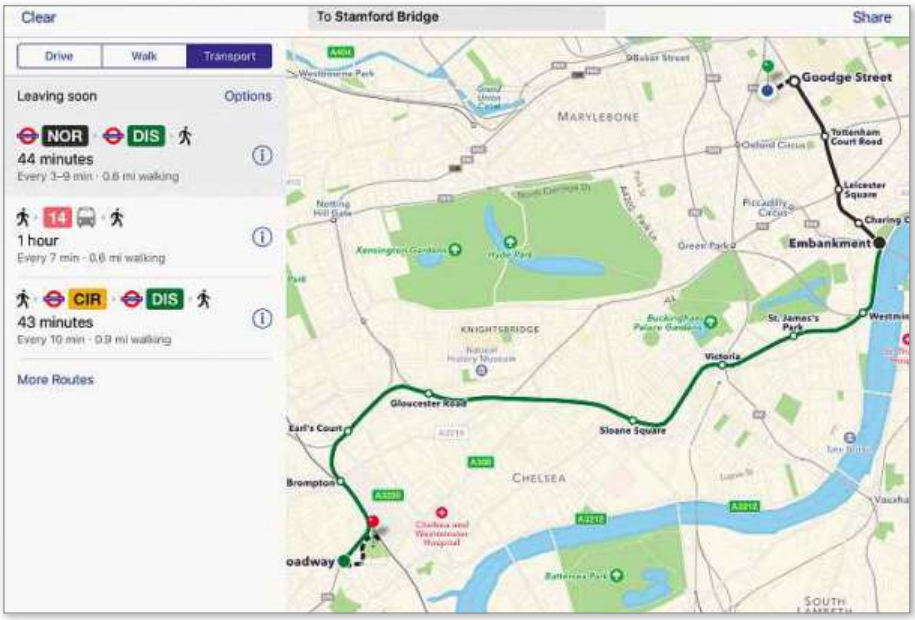
If you have different contacts with the same name, the app will display them in a list and ask you which you want to call. Just say 'The first' or 'The second' (based on their position in the list) and the app will make the call. If Google Now doesn't understand your request, you'll see a Who dropdown menu, from which you can tap the person to call.

iOS

Get public-transport directions in London and Paris

One of the most welcome new tools in iOS 9 is the ability to get directions using public transport within Apple Maps. The absence of this feature was one of the main reasons people preferred Google Maps to Apple's offering. Aside from US cities, the feature is currently only available for London, Paris and Berlin, but more locations are expected soon.

To use it, open the Maps app. Tap Allow if you are prompted for permission to use your location. Within a few seconds, you should see your current location as a blue dot on a map.



Now type your destination (address or postcode) in the search field at the top, then tap Search on the virtual keyboard. You'll see a pin on your destination with an icon showing an estimate of how long your journey will take. Tap the icon to open a panel on the left-hand side with options to drive, walk and use public transport. Now tap the Transport tab to see a list of the fastest routes by public transport (see screenshot above). Next, tap the 'i' symbol beside your chosen option to see a breakdown of your journey (including times, Tube and bus connections). Finally, tap Start at the bottom to begin your navigation using GPS.

ANDROID

Video-record what you do on your screen

One of the best ways to illustrate a problem with your device is to record your onscreen actions as a video, then send this to whoever you're requesting help from. There are a few free Android apps that let you do this, but the best is AZ Screen Recorder – No Root

Best New Apps

What you should install this fortnight

Meter
Free
Android: www.snipca.com/18236
Live (animated) wallpapers look impressive but they drain your battery. This helpful live wallpaper from Google displays your battery percentage, Wi-Fi signal and notifications as three animations every time you open your device. You therefore get useful device info without draining your battery or having to delve into your settings.

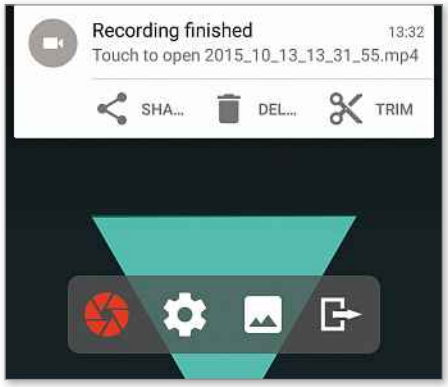
Adobe Photoshop Fix
Free
iOS: www.snipca.com/18235
You previously needed an Adobe subscription to use its photo-editing apps, but this is the first one that's completely free (though you will need to create an Adobe account first). It's a brilliant app if you just want to retouch and reshape your photos or remove shadows, blemishes and red eye from them.

The Weather Channel
Free
Windows Phone: www.snipca.com/18237
Winter is coming and the new alerts in this app will warn you of severe weather. It's now an official Windows app, which means you can simply ask Cortana what the weather has in store. Its background image always reflects your current location's weather, and there are also new interactive maps

(www.snipca.com/18234).

Unlike other apps, this one won't occupy your whole screen upon launch. Instead, you'll see four icons on your screen (see lower half of screenshot below). Tap the circular icon on the left, then Start Now. You'll see a five-second countdown on your screen, after which whatever you do on your device will be recorded. A videocam icon at the top left of your notification area indicates the recording is taking place. Swipe down from the top to open your notification center, then tap Stop (to finish and save your recording). You'll now see a 'Recording finished' notification with three options (see top of screenshot below). Tap the notification to watch your video.

You need to buy the premium version of the app (£2.32) to trim your recorded video, so instead just delete and re-record it if it's not quite right. When you're happy with your video, tap Share for options to share it using third-party compatible apps. If your video is less than 10 seconds, then share it via email, otherwise use a cloud-storage service, such as Google Drive or Dropbox. Tap the rectangular icon with an arrow (see bottom right of screenshot) to close the app.



iOS

Resume music playback when you insert your headphones

In Issue 460, we featured some of the best features of iOS 9 (Secret Tips, page 48). To take advantage of these, you'll need to update your device. If you haven't already, tap Settings, General, Software Update, then Install.

Apple's latest operating system has other neat tricks up its sleeve, many of which are easily overlooked. For example, the more eagle-eyed among you may have noticed a small music app icon (at the bottom left) every time you insert earphones or headphones into a locked device. This icon represents the music app you last used (for example, Apple Music, Google Play Music or Spotify). Simply hold the icon and swipe to the top (you'll need to enter your passcode if your device is locked) and the app will immediately launch, resuming where you left off.

WINDOWS PHONE

Access your phone's files via your PC

Windows Phone has a simple list of options when you connect your device to your PC. On your PC, open My Computer, click your device name (in the Portable Devices section), then Phone to see six folders (see screenshot right).

The first two contain documents and files you've downloaded. To transfer music from your PC to your phone, copy them to the Music folder on your device. The Pictures folder contains sub-folders (Screenshots and Camera Roll) letting you easily transfer these files to your PC. Windows Phone has its own default ringtones, but you can use any music on your PC as a ringtone by copying it to the Ringtones folder. If your device is running out of space, open the Videos folder, transfer all its files to your PC, then delete them from your device.

Games With Kids

What to play together on your phone and tablet

AGES 0-5

Peppa's Paintbox

Free www.snipca.com/18238 (Android)
Free www.snipca.com/18239 (iOS)
The new Peppa Pig app will give your toddler hours of colouring fun. They use their own palette and 'magical' drawing tools, and earn stickers after each completed drawing.

AGES 6-10

ThinkRolls 2

£2.29 www.snipca.com/18241 (Android)
£2.29 www.snipca.com/18242 (iOS)
These 'brain game' puzzles will teach your kids about physics, including subjects like gravity, force, electricity, expansion and compression. Playing as the cute 'ThinkRolls' characters, they'll need to use logic and problem-solving skills to complete each of the 200+ levels.

AGES 11-16

Bowling King

Free www.snipca.com/18243 (Android)
Free www.snipca.com/18244 (iOS)
This simple tap-and-swipe game is the perfect way to bond with your teenager. You can compete against each other or play in the same team, and compete in tournaments around the world. Each tournament wins you chips, with which you can buy superior bowling balls.

WINDOWS VISTA, 7, 8

Pin your favourite websites for easy access

All browsers (including Internet Explorer, Chrome and Firefox) save a record of the websites you frequently visit. You can view these in a list by opening the browser, then right-clicking its icon on your Taskbar. It's easy to 'pin' one of these listed sites to the right-click menu for easy access. The advantage of doing this is that, while other websites on your list may change, your pinned sites will stay there until you unpin them.

To do this, right-click your browser's icon on your Taskbar, move your cursor to the listed website you want to pin, then click the pin icon beside it. You'll now see a new Pinned section at the top listing that website. Now whenever you want to open that website, simply right-click the browser icon on your Taskbar and click the listing.

WINDOWS XP, VISTA, 7, 8, 10

Stop Dropbox hijacking your Print Screen key

The Print Screen key is useful for saving screenshots to your PC's clipboard, from where you can paste and edit them using Paint (or any suitable third-party program). If you can't produce screenshots using your Print Screen key and you've recently installed Dropbox, the program may have hijacked that key's functionality. Dropbox has a default setting that saves your screenshots to a dedicated Screenshots folder within the program whenever you press the Print Screen key.

To disable this Dropbox feature, right-click Dropbox in your PC's System Tray, click the cog icon at the top right, then Preferences. Now click the Import tab, untick 'Share screenshots using Dropbox' (see screenshot below left), click Apply, then OK.

WINDOWS 10

Choose where OneDrive syncs your files

Microsoft's cloud-storage program OneDrive comes pre-installed with Windows 10. If you chose not to sync the program when upgrading your PC, you'll notice the OneDrive icon sitting in your PC's System Tray with a red cross on it. To sync your files, click the icon, then click the 'Choose folders to sync' link. By default, all your OneDrive folders will be ticked but you can untick the ones you don't want to sync (see screenshot above right).

Now click the 'Change where OneDrive is stored' link at the bottom. By default, it's stored on your C Drive, but you can navigate the menus to choose an alternative location for your files. When you've finished, click OK, then OK again to start saving your files and syncing your OneDrive account.

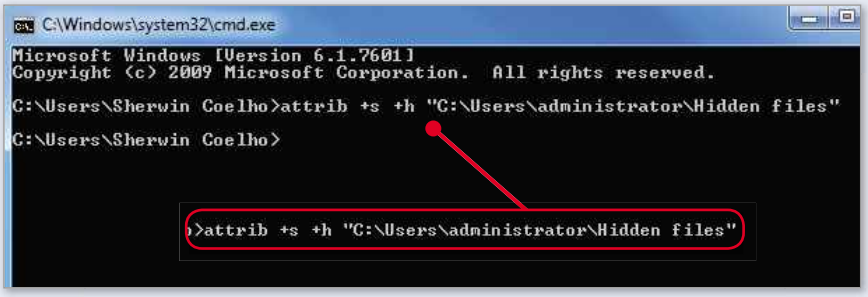
WINDOWS 7, 8, 10

Hide a folder so no one will find it

Hidden folders are a brilliant way to keep sensitive content away from prying eyes. There are different methods for hiding a folder without using a third-party program, but none is more secure than the one we describe here. This involves hiding (and revealing) your folder using your PC's Command Prompt. First, navigate to the folder you want to hide, right-click it, click Properties, then make a note of its 'Location' path. For this example, we'll use a folder called 'Hidden files' saved to the following location: **C:\Users\administrator** (obviously this will differ from your folder and path).

Now press the Windows key+R (Run command), type cmd and press Enter to open your Command Prompt. Type the following text into it: attrib +s +h "C:\Users\administrator\Hidden files" (see screenshot) and press Enter. Now go to the location by following the path and you won't see the folder. In the text above, '+s +h' is the command to hide the folder and the section within double quote marks is the folder location, followed by its name.

The only way that a folder can be revealed is by entering a reveal code into Command Prompt. This is the same as the hide code, except you replace '+s +h' with '-s and –h'. Therefore, the code you'd need to enter into Command Prompt is: attrib -s -h "C:\Users\administrator\Hidden files". Navigate to the path to see your folder.

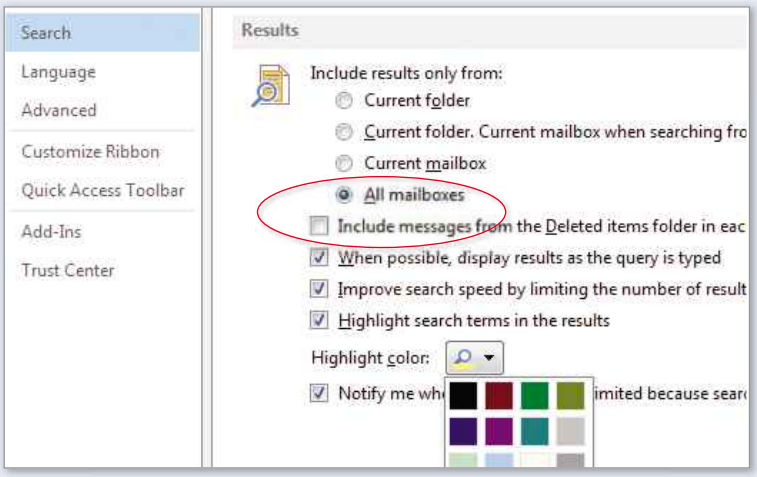


Make Office Better

Expert tips for every program

OUTLOOK

Make Outlook search all folders at once



If you've created a number of folders within Outlook for organising your emails, you may have realised that whenever you search for a term within Outlook, by default it will only search the folder you're currently in. This means that you'll need to repeat the search in each folder until you find what you're looking for. Thankfully, there's an easy way to change Outlook's default search settings so that it searches your entire account.

To do this, click File, Options, then Search on the left. Change the 'Include results only from' selection to 'All mailboxes' (see screenshot top right). Tick the first box at the top if you want your search results to include emails you've recently deleted (Outlook stores them in a Deleted Items folder). The other boxes are ticked by default. Add a line break after this sentence.

To change the highlight colour for search terms in emails (from the default yellow), click the 'Highlight color' dropdown menu and choose an alternative.

If you don't like any of the colours shown, click 'More colours' at the bottom, the Standard tab at the top left and choose a colour from the hexagonal palette, then click OK.

WORD

Disable spelling and grammar checks in your current document

One of Word's most useful features is highlighting words it thinks you've misspelt (red underline) and grammatical errors it thinks you've made (purple underline). If you see a lot of irritating red lines across your document, it's probably because Word also highlights as errors any names (of people and places, say) it doesn't recognise. This can be distracting, but thankfully you can easily turn off these spelling and grammar check tools.

To do that, click File at the top left of the document you're working on, Options, the Proofing tab on the left, then scroll to the bottom. Now tick the two boxes (see screenshot above) – 'Hide spelling errors in this document only' and 'Hide grammar errors in this document only'. The 'Exceptions for' dropdown menu is set to your current document, but you can choose any of the past three documents you opened to apply the changes there. Click OK when you've finished.

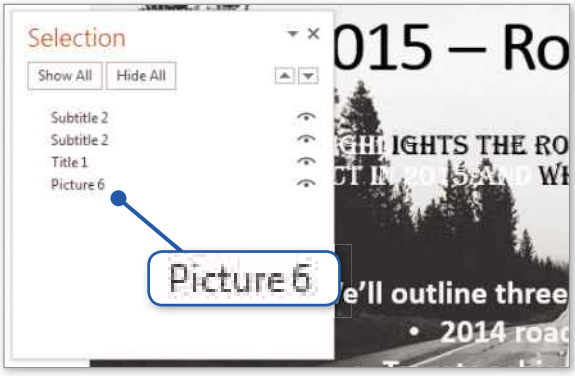
POWERPOINT

Reposition elements in your slide

If you've inserted a picture into your slide, but notice that it's covering your text, don't panic. You can move the picture into the background and bring your text to the front. While there are a number of ways to do this, the easiest involves using PowerPoint's Selection Pane.

To access this, click the Home tab, the Select dropdown menu at the top right (in the Editing section), then click Selection Pane. It will slide in from the right, but you can click Selection at the top and drag it so that the pane floats freely. This lists all your text-field options (title, subtitles, etc.) and any pictures in your slide.

The elements are ordered according to how they are layered on your slide. Pictures will always sit at the top of the list, meaning they will sit on top of any text in your slide. To place a picture behind your text, simply click the Picture option in the list and drag it to the bottom of the list (see screenshot below left). The small eye icon beside each element lets you switch that element on and off to see what your slide looks like without it. Close the pane when you've finished.



EXCEL

Move or copy a column quickly

You can always use the common keyboard shortcuts Ctrl+X (cut), Ctrl+C (copy) and Ctrl+V (paste) to move or copy a column in Excel. But there is a better way to do this.

First, move your cursor to the header of column (the letters along the top) that you want to move or copy. Next, click the down arrow that appears to select that column. Now move your cursor to any of the column's edges (left or right). The arrow cursor will change to a black cross (indicating you can now move or copy the column).

To move the column, simply click and drag it to wherever you want (left or right) within your spreadsheet. To copy it, press and hold the Ctrl key, then click and drag it to your desired location.

NirLauncher

Speed up navigation, force apps to launch the way you want and add hundreds of extra tools

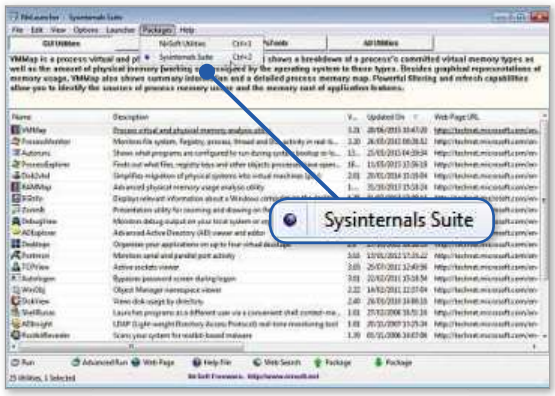
Turn on text descriptions

NirLauncher, which has just been updated to work in Windows 10 (see Best Free Software, Issue 459), puts hundreds of free, portable NirSoft tools in one launcher. Download it free from http://launcher.nirsoft.net. In the program window, the collection of tools is categorised for easy navigation, but it's still not always clear what each tool does. So open the Options menu and tick Show Description Text – and now you'll see a more comprehensive description of each tool's functions.

Add new tool packages

NirLauncher can integrate with other suites of tools, notably Microsoft's Sysinternals, to become your one-stop utility shop. First download the latest Sysinternals from www.snipca.com/18178, and open the ZIP file (right-click and choose Extract All). Now download the 'sysinternals2.nlp' file from NirSoft at www.snipca.com/18179. Copy this file into your Sysinternals folder, then drag it into the NirLauncher window.

You'll now be able to switch between these app 'packages' via the Packages menu (see screenshot above right), or by pressing Ctrl+1, Ctrl+2 and so on. For a list of other packages that can be integrated, return to the NirLauncher site, where you can download the NLP files for those packages.



Add new packages of tools, such as Sysinternals

Set default launch attributes

We referred to NirLauncher's Advanced Run button in Issue 459's Best Free Software. This lets you launch tools with extra parameters and actions, such as opening in full screen or running as an administrator. You can make some of these settings permanent, so they act as defaults. Open the Options menu, select Default Run Settings, make your choices and then click Set As Default.

Press Enter for Advanced Run

If you've had a look at the Advanced Options entry on the Options menu you may have found little of interest on first inspection. But look again: by default, double-clicking an item launches it, but so does pressing Enter if you prefer. Click the 'Press the Enter key' dropdown menu and choose Advanced Run. Now, when you need to launch a tool in Advanced mode, you can just hit Enter.

See more tools at once

By default, NirLauncher displays tools as one long list, each with a short description. That's really helpful when you're learning what everything does. But after a while, the chore of having to scroll through these countless entries will be annoyingly time consuming. To get around the launcher faster, click View followed by List Style and then choose List. Alternatively, make NirLauncher look like the Windows Control Panel by choosing the Icons option.

Create a plugin for BartPE

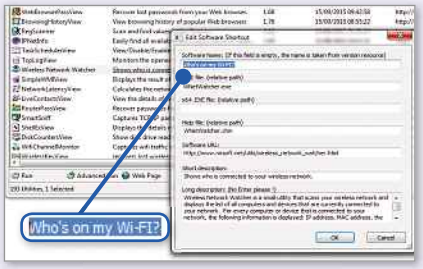
If you use Bart's Preinstalled Environment (BartPE, www.snipca.com/18177) to create bootable Windows CDs or DVDs, then you can instruct NirLauncher to create the necessary files so you can use it as a BartPE plugin. You can then use NirLauncher straight from your bootable disc.

From the Launcher menu choose Generate BartPE Plugin Files then click Yes to confirm, followed by OK. Now copy the entire contents of your NirLauncher folder into one called 'NirLauncher' within BartPE's plugin folder, then simply create your bootable disc in the usual way.

Customise NirLauncher using Edit Mode

The Edit Mode entry in NirLauncher's Options menu lets you edit the list of tools and even add your own portable programs to the launcher. Select Edit Mode, then double-click a tool in the list to open an Edit Software Shortcut dialogue box. Here, you can tweak information including the tool's name (see screenshot) and its long description.

Edit Mode also activates numerous greyed-out options in the Launcher menu, along with the ability to add your own favourite utilities to NirLauncher. To add a tool, select the program group and then drag and drop your tool's EXE file into the NirLauncher window. Choose Save Package from the Launcher menu, then remove the tick from Edit Mode in the Options menu.



Next issue Secret Tips For... LibreOffice 5

Quantum computing

One of science's weirdest theories is behind the development of astonishingly fast PCs

What is it?

The technique of applying the theories of quantum physics to computing. For years, in computers scientists have tried to replicate the strange behaviour of subatomic particles, with the aim of dramatically boosting processing speed and power.

What kind of strange behaviour?

That atoms can exist in two states at the same time – a condition called 'superposition'. In traditional computing, data is processed as binary bits of information. These always exist as a 0 or a 1, limiting how many calculations a computer can make.

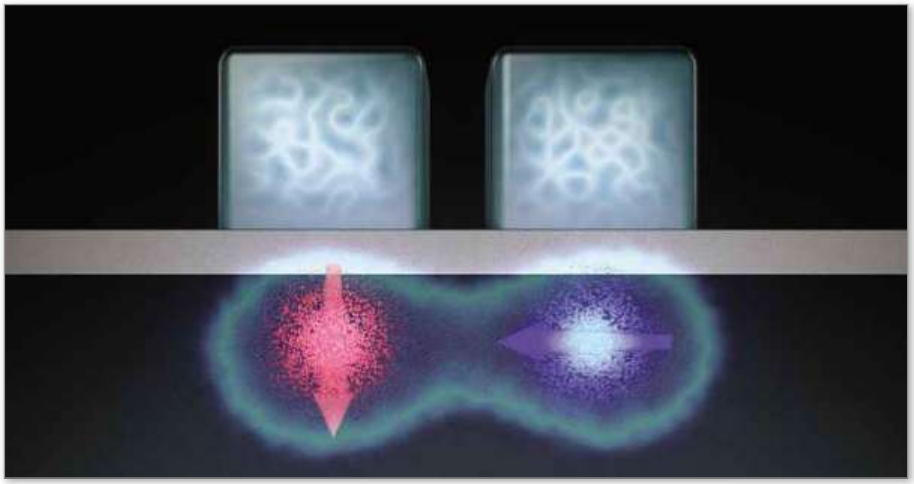
But quantum computing turns bits into 'qubits', allowing them to exist in multiple states at the same time – a superposition of both 0 *and* 1, and all numbers in between. Don't worry if you can't get your head round this. Even science's best brains have struggled with the implications of quantum physics and mechanics. As theoretical physicist Richard Feynman famously said: "If you think you understand quantum mechanics, you don't understand quantum mechanics".

How fast would a quantum computer be?

Staggeringly fast. A quantum computer would be able to perform millions of calculations simultaneously, making them much faster than modern PCs, which work things out in sequence. How's this for an example: a quantum computer comprising 500 qubits could do more calculations in one process than there are atoms in the universe.

But do they actually exist yet?

Only inside the most advanced laboratories and in the heads of the most ambitious scientists. But a recent breakthrough should boost their progress. A team working at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) has shown how a 'two-qubit logic gate', a crucial building block of a quantum PC, can work as a silicon transistor. They created the illustration above to help demonstrate the process, though we think it looks more like the kind of special effects used in the original *Star Trek* TV series



A two-qubit logic gate is put to work as a silicon transistor... obviously

How significant is the breakthrough?

Very, because building a quantum PC will be easier if scientists can use material that is already used in the industry, such as silicon. Professor Andrew Dzurak from UNSW called his team's work a "game changer". He said: "This makes the building of a quantum computer much more feasible, since it is based on the same manufacturing technology as today's computer industry".

Experts claim that all the components needed to make a silicon-based quantum PC have now been built.

Great. Shall I order mine now?

Not so fast. There's a big problem with qubits: they are inherently unstable, and prone to errors. It is proving difficult to get them to perform accurate calculations. You'll have to wait years – decades, even – for a quantum PC to arrive in your home.

So how can I get my hands on one?

You could apply for a job at Nasa or Google. They are working together on the D-Wave 2X quantum computer at Nasa's Ames Research centre in California. But again, there's a major problem: the qubits in the 2X require an operating temperature near absolute zero. That's 180 times colder than deep space.

This won't put off researchers because there's lots of money to be made from quantum computers. Traders could use them to make a fortune in the stock market, while medical companies could carry out faster and more accurate trials.

But will hackers also want to use them?

Definitely, because they could be capable of breaking the encryption that protects private communications online. Today's encryption systems use prime numbers so large that cracking them using existing technology would take longer than the expected lifespan of the Solar System. In theory, a quantum computer could jump straight to the correct answer, saving you roughly 10 billion years of calculation time. Now *that's* what we call a quantum leap.

Windows 10

SPECIAL REPORT

THE FIRST 100 DAYS

Is it a flop like Vista, is it a success like XP – or could Microsoft's super new operating system beat them all? Jane Hoskyn gives Windows 10 its first big progress report

In his first 100 days as US President, John F Kennedy lost the space race to the Russians and bungled an invasion of Cuba (www.snipca.com/18211). By comparison, Windows 10's first 100 days have been pretty successful, but there have been bad days as well as good. You'll know from our News pages and Problems Fixed series – and possibly from your own experience – that Windows 10's launch has not been an unmitigated triumph.

Still, no operating system (OS) – not Windows 7, not even the legendary XP – has set sail without a few headline-grabbing blips and teething troubles. The real measure of quality and success comes with time.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Find out what's coming next in Windows 10 – and how to have your say
- Discover pros and cons of auto-updates
- Get Windows 10 for free without 7 or 8.1
- Fixed botched updates
- Remove hidden Windows 10 junk
- Change your settings to stop Microsoft spying on you

The good, the bad and the future

Why '100 days'? Well, apart from the handy catchphrase – coined in 1933 by President Franklin D Roosevelt – and the neat symmetry with '10', 100 days (three months and a bit, in old money) is just long enough to see how a newcomer is faring. Windows 10 has now had time to show its mettle against predecessors and rivals.

This issue of *Computeractive* goes on sale 91 days after Windows 10's public version launched on Wednesday July 29 2015, and Day 100 falls on 6 November, so it's time for a thorough progress report. Here we weigh up Windows 10's hits and misses and reveal what we want to see from the next 100 days.

WINDOWS 10: WHAT IT'S GOT RIGHT SO FAR

DAY 1 Automatic tweaks

After nearly a year in Preview mode, you might have expected Windows 10 to be the finished article on 29 July. But that long-awaited day turned out to be not so much a launch date as another milestone in Windows 10's ongoing series of updates – and that's a big relief after the Windows 8 debacle. Never again will Microsoft release an unfinished OS (or indeed any OS, see box below). Instead, it'll keep improving the one you've got.

The 29 July release was the first public 'Build' of Windows 10, and there will be many more to come. The second is due in November, and you'll get it automatically via Windows Update.

In between Builds, you'll get "incremental" tweaks and patches. Windows 10 delivers updates from the internet almost constantly (see screenshot right), just like on your tablet and phone. You may be perturbed to notice occasional changes to menus and tools, but that's because you've now got an ever-evolving OS. When things go wrong, Windows 10 can swiftly fix it in a way that poor old Windows 8 couldn't.

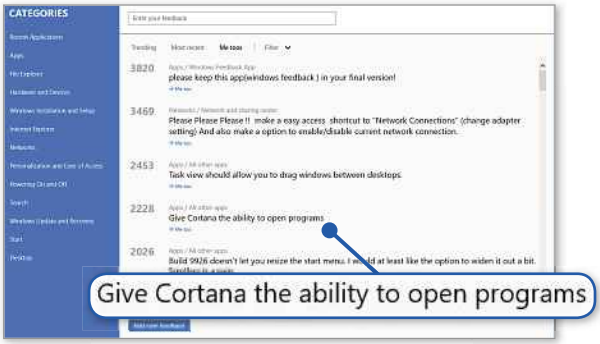
Windows 10 will evolve and improve continuously through Windows Update

DAY 20 Memory boost

Less than three weeks after Windows 10's public launch, a new Preview Build was released to members of the Windows 10 Insider Program (https://insider.windows.com). The Preview Builds are essentially betas. If a feature gets good feedback from Insiders, it may turn up in the public version of Windows 10. If it doesn't, we shall never speak of it again.

Preview Builds also give the rest of us a sneak preview of what's coming next to the main version of Windows 10. August's 'Build 10525' (www.snipca.com/18247), for example, tested two new features: more colour options (fairly interesting) and a much-improved Memory Manager that helped prevent PC crashes when running lots of tools at once (very interesting).

Whether these features make it on to all our Windows 10 PCs remains to be seen, but you can find out what Insiders think by opening the Windows 10 Feedback app (type feedback into Start; find out more at www.snipca.com/18248).



Find out what other people say about Windows 10 in the Windows Feedback app

DAY 51 Great Start

The Windows 10 Start menu was received so well that Microsoft could have packed up and gone home on 29 July. But, of course, that's not the way Windows 10 works, so the Start menu got even better in the Preview Build released on 18 September (Build 10547, www.snipca.com/18219).

The new Build gave you the option to add a fourth column of tiles to the default three, letting you see more shortcuts at once. It also made the tiles easier to customise, for example by making them wider – which will bring comfort to Windows 8/8.1 users who liked their big tappable Start Screen.

September's update also improved several Windows 10 apps including Mail, Maps, Photos and Calendar, and made it possible to 'snap' apps to the left and right when in 'Tablet mode' (www.snipca.com/18224).

On the downside, many Preview users found that apps failed to update ▶

DAY MINUS 86: THE FINAL WINDOWS

Windows 10 is the final installable version of the OS – ever. This bombshell was dropped 86 days before the July launch, at the company's Ignite conference (http://ignite.microsoft.com). The site bombards you with jargon, but you can read the important bits on our sister site Expert Reviews (www.snipca.com/18213). No more Windows editions may sound dramatic, but Android, iOS, Linux distros and Mac OS X (coincidentally 'Mac OS 10') have worked this way for ages. They drip-feed your device with updates, improving bit by bit in response to feedback and advances in technology. All you have to do is tap or click OK.

automatically in the new Build, and they had to change their settings to fix it (see page 55). But the big picture was very positive: Microsoft was clearly listening to feedback from Insiders (real people, remember; not employees) and putting it into action.

The customisable Windows 10 Start menu is constantly being improved

DAY 69 110 million devices – and rising

On 6 October Microsoft threw a party for the new Surface Pro 4, and promptly upstaged the pricey laptop by announcing that Windows 10 now runs on more than 110 million devices worldwide. Probably a few million more by the time you read this.

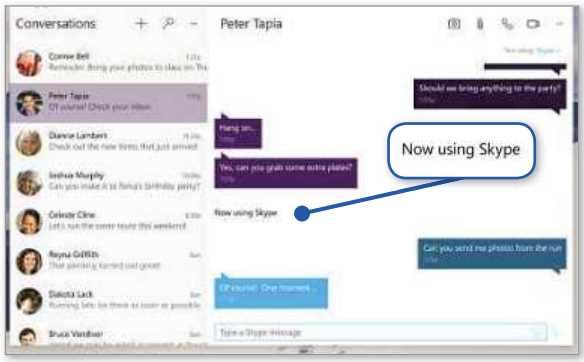
The use of the word 'devices' in the announcement by Microsoft's Terry Myerson (pictured above right) is quite deliberate. Microsoft wants you to think of Windows 10 as a "unified" OS for all your devices, including tablet and phone. That's still wishful thinking given the domination by Android and iOS (www.snipca.com/18253), but it may be a sign of things to come, slowly.

What we really *do* want to see – fast – is a much higher take-up of Windows 10 on business PCs, such as those in your bank and supermarket. Just 8 million of those 110 million installations were on business devices, and a shocking number of companies still run XP (read more at www.snipca.com/18254).

DAY 76 Installation U-turn

At launch, Windows 10 was free if you installed it over a fully activated version of Windows 7 or Windows 8.1 (you'd have to upgrade to Windows 8.1 first). That excluded you if you'd bought Windows 7, 8 or 8.1, but didn't currently have it installed, or if you'd rather do a clean install of Windows 10.

We felt this was a huge oversight (or huge cheek) and looked forward to moaning about it over the page – but Microsoft changed its mind just before we went to press. With the launch of Preview Build 10565 (www.snipca.com/18230), you can now install Windows 10 for free, from scratch, as long as you've got a genuine product key for Windows 7, Windows 8 or Windows 8.1.



Skype is now fully integrated with Messaging and Phone apps in the Preview

The Build also sees Skype fully integrated with the built-in Messaging and Phone apps as well as the new all-in-one Skype app, so you'll never have to install the traditional Skype program again. If you read Issue 460's Named & Shamed column, you'll know why we're so pleased about that: Skype's installer includes PUPs that could take over your browser.

Currently this Build is only available to 'Fast ring' Insiders (see box below), but its changes are likely to be rolled out to the rest of us in the first big public update to Windows 10, now due in November.

Terry Myerson is Microsoft's Executive Vice President, Windows and Devices Group

DAY 80 £100 trade-in

Great news for anyone with an old PC or laptop: if you hurried down to your local, erm, Amazon Marketplace or eBay between 6 and 27 October 'to 'Trade Up' your old (working) machine for a new Windows 10 PC, Microsoft gave you cashback of between £30 and £100 (www.snipca.com/18321). Shame they had to end the offer the day we went on sale – but if you're a *Computeractive* subscriber you may get your issue early enough to take advantage of the offer.

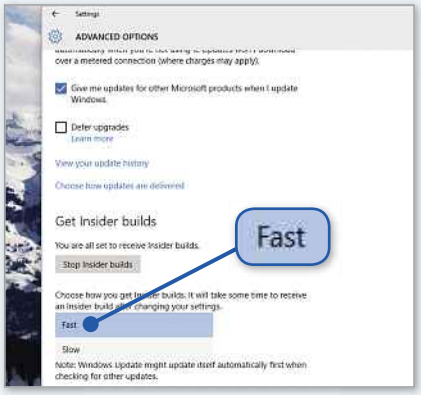
HACK THE INSIDERS' FAST RING

Microsoft has to make sure its Insiders send useful feedback, so it offers a bribe – sorry, incentive – in the form of 'Fast ring' membership (ah, if only they'd called it 'fellowship').

If you're diligent about trying out all the new features and offering feedback, you're moved from the default 'Slow ring' to the 'Fast ring'. This gold star is your ticket to certain Builds (including the latest, 10565) that aren't available to 'Slow' Insiders.

If you've been promoted to Fast, you'll see the option in PC Settings, under 'Updates and Recovery' (Preview version only).

Users share tricks for hacking into the Fast ring on the Microsoft Community site (www.snipca.com18233). One member writes: "I, too, was stuck on the slow ring. But I busted out!" and offers a possible cheat: open Windows Update (Preview version), click 'Check for Updates' and then quickly click Advanced Options before it disappears. Click Fast (see screenshot right), and you're in.



WINDOWS 10: WHAT IT'S GOT WRONG SO FAR

DAY 1 Dismal DVD Player

The initial response to Windows 10's public launch was like a crowd at a fairground. First an "ahh" at the Start menu, then an "ooh" at its speed – and then an "argh!" at Windows DVD Player.

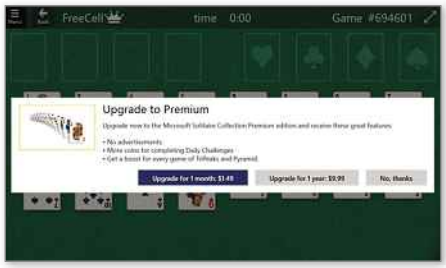
The Windows DVD Player app (£11.59, www.snipca.com/18257) was the first real reminder that Microsoft has to make money from its "free" OS. Charging 12 quid for an app rated very badly by Windows Store users was a sign of hidden costs to come.

The app replaces the DVD support that came as part of Windows Media Center (WMC), which was dumped for Windows 10. In the next issue, we'll reveal our favourite alternative tools for this and other features that have sadly fallen by the wayside.

DAY 5 Solitaire adverts

More hidden costs soon wriggled out of the Windows 10 woodwork and into the much-loved game Solitaire.

The game – created 26 years ago by an unpaid Microsoft intern who never received any royalties (Wikipedia page: www.snipca.com/18276) – was dumped in Windows 8.1 and reborn in a free Microsoft Solitaire Collection app for Windows 10 (www.snipca.com/18265). However "free" comes at a price, again, and users complained of 30-second, full-screen video adverts that cost a few pounds to remove.



Solitaire users have to 'Upgrade to Premium' to remove intrusive adverts

DAY 8 Reboot loop

Annoyance turned to distress just a week after Windows 10's launch, thanks to an automatic update (KB3081424, www.snipca.com/18278) released to all users via Windows Update.

Unlike the Builds released to Preview users (still a small minority), this update was a patch and brought no fancy new features. Instead, it brought havoc to many users in the form of the now-infamous 'reboot loop'.

An automatic update sent many people's PCs into a 'reboot loop'

Soon after the update began installing, an error message would appear (see screenshot above). The PC would restart and then the whole hoopla would begin again.

Patches are generally a very good thing (see page 57), but this one made many people's PCs unusable. If you'd bought that PC specially for Windows 10, you'd be understandably apoplectic.

The problem was fixed by a new update a week later, but the fact that it happened at all was a sign that Windows 10's auto-update system wasn't all good news.

DAY 10 Ransomware scam

Cybercriminals were delighted by the Windows 10 hype. Hackers love a big launch – as we saw in our Cover Feature in Issue 460 – because it provides irresistible 'click-bait' in which to embed malware.

In this case, the click-bait comprised emails titled 'Windows 10 Free Update' and containing ZIP files which, if unzipped, infected your PC with CTB-Locker ransomware (see News, Issue 456).

We can't blame Microsoft for this one, of course, but it's very much part of the 'First 100 days' story. To stay safe, only install the OS and apps from the Microsoft website and Windows Store.

DAY 27 Cortana invades Android and iOS

Microsoft really wants us to love Cortana, the "clever new personal assistant" launched in Windows 8.1 and built into Windows 10 (www.snipca.com/18280).

But no-one likes a smarty-pants, especially one that talks all over you. The nicest thing we could find to say about Cortana in our Cover Feature full of Windows 10 tips (Issue 459) was that it's "innovative". Actually, it's not even that – it's very similar to Apple's four-year-old Siri and the Google Now voice assistant that pops up uninvited in Android.

In August, Microsoft made Cortana even harder to avoid by launching it for Android, albeit as a beta that you have to sign up for (www.snipca.com/18281). An iOS version is in the works, too, perhaps to taunt iPad and iPhone users who are already fed up to the eyeballs with Siri.

Mercifully, Cortana is not enabled by default in Windows 10, and it has some useful features that don't require it (sorry, "her") to speak.

DAY 37 Threshold 2 delayed

By September, Windows 10 had really become a "them and us" OS. Insiders got fabulous new Preview features and had their suggestions taken seriously by Microsoft, while the rest of us were left to struggle with reboot loops.

We had been due to get our first proper update, codenamed 'Threshold 2', in October, but on 3 September Microsoft admitted it wouldn't be ready (www.snipca.com/18282). It's now due in November, but no date has been given.

Microsoft won't say what's in Threshold 2, either, but it's likely to include the much-improved Memory Manager, as tested in Build 10525, and the more flexible Start menu, from Build 10547. Keep an eye on our News pages for announcements.

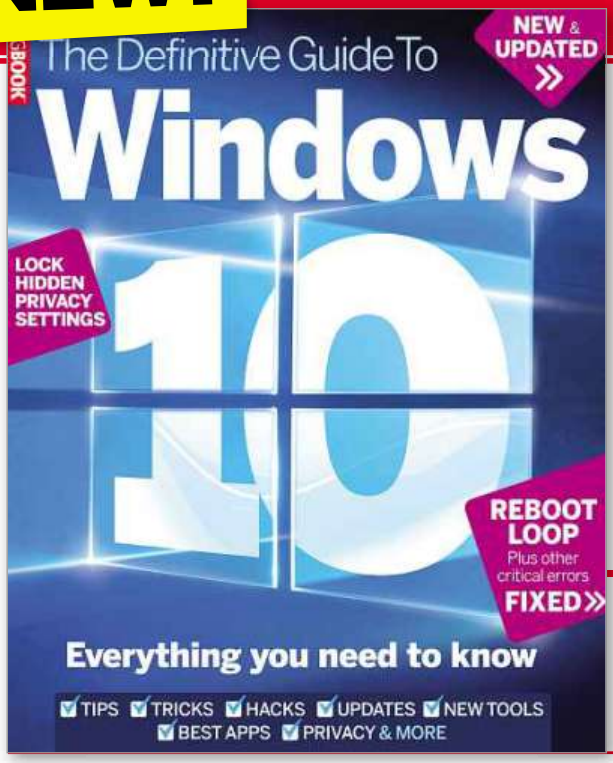
Windows 10's first big public update has been pushed back to November

Computer active

Computeractive Bookstore

NEW!

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO WINDOWS 10



This 148-page book is the only guide you need on Microsoft's new operating system. You'll learn how to master all the new tools, lock Microsoft's weak privacy settings and prevent future updates from wrecking your PC. It includes fixes for all the problems and bugs that have appeared in Windows 10 since it launched. Plus, you'll discover how to make Cortana understand you, remove the apps you hate, fix the dreaded Reboot Loop problem, master the new Edge browser, and stop Microsoft sharing your personal info. Don't use Windows 10 without this book by your side!

BUY IT NOW FROM AMAZON
at www.snipca.com/17716

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO FREE SOFTWARE

In our new 148-page book, we recommend only the very best free programs that deliver high-quality features and no nasty surprises (no junk - guaranteed!). It's packed with step-by-step tutorials and how-to guides for safe downloads – plus you'll learn which free antivirus you should use.

BUY IT NOW FROM AMAZON
at www.snipca.com/16785

RASPBERRY PI FOR KIDS

The Raspberry Pi is the incredible £20 British computer that's taking the world by storm. It's ideal for children of all ages to experiment, play games and learn valuable skills. We've updated this 148-page book for 2015 to include instructions on mastering the new Pi models (A+ and B+).

BUY IT NOW FROM AMAZON
at www.snipca.com/16851

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO ANDROID

Inside this 148-page book you'll find all the free apps, expert tips and easy-to-follow Workshops you need to get the most out of your phone or tablet. You'll find buying advice, including reviews of the latest tablets and phones, and everything you need to know about taking your first steps with your new device.

BUY IT NOW FROM AMAZON
at www.snipca.com/12476

DAY 44 Microsoft's massive hidden junk file

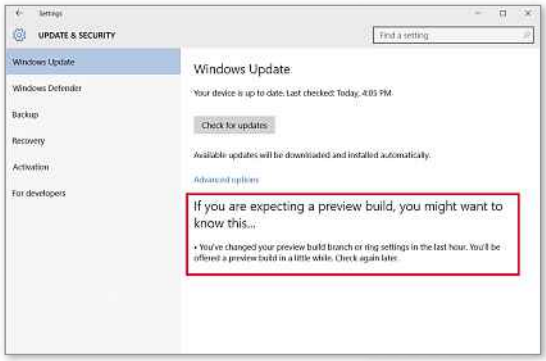
Windows 7 and 8/8.1 users started finding a whopping 6GB Windows 10 file in a hidden system folder, '$Windows.~BT' – even though they'd never expressed interest in upgrading to Windows 10.

Microsoft explained the file was to "help upgradable devices get ready for Windows 10", which is rather arrogant. What's worse, you had to take special steps to remove it (see Workshop, Issue 460), a bit like when Apple installed the new U2 album on people's iPhones without being asked (www.snipca.com/18285). We hope these examples of hard-drive space theft don't become the norm for OS makers.

DAY 51 Failed app updates

Build 10547 wasn't all good news. Those improved apps we mentioned on page 51 failed to update automatically for many Preview users (see News, Issue 459), who had to fix the problem themselves by changing a Windows Store setting (www.snipca.com/18284; scroll down for the useful stuff).

Meanwhile, Microsoft failed to fix two problems: erroneous permissions errors in Command Prompt when pasting file names, and an odd warning message ("you might want to know this...") in the Settings app (see screenshot below left). Microsoft's solution? "Ignore it for now."

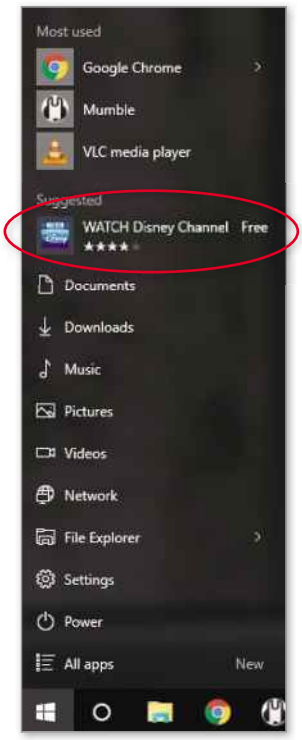


Users have been told to ignore Settings messages and fix failed app updates

DAY 59 Adverts in Start menu

By late September, Microsoft adverts were invading an even more sacred place than Solitaire: the Start menu (News, Issue 460). Users suddenly found the menu included 'Suggestions' for tools they'd never installed and don't intend to (see screenshot right).

At the time of writing, the adverts have only infested the Start menus of certain Preview users, and can be switched off in Settings. However they may spread to the full release soon. Microsoft has form in this department, as you'll know if you've installed the Bing and MSN PUPs in Skype.



Unwanted 'Suggested' apps are appearing in the Start menu

DAY 68 Edge bombs

Just as Microsoft was making its triumphant "110 million devices" announcement, researchers at Quantcast unveiled a more sobering statistic: the Edge browser is being used on only 12 per cent of Windows 10 PCs worldwide (www.snipca.com/18294).

That's shocking news for Microsoft. Edge – the supposedly game-changing successor to Internet Explorer (IE) – is the default browser in Windows 10. But it appears that it's mostly being used to download Google's Chrome – which has a whopping 71 per cent share in Windows 10 alone. Edge is also used by fewer Windows 10 users than Firefox, which has a 15 per cent share.

More alarming still, Edge's market share isn't much higher than IE's. IE isn't intended to be used in Windows 10, but it has managed a five-per-cent share anyway. IE support is being phased out from January 2016 (www.snipca.com/18293), and Microsoft will not be happy to find the old dog snapping at Edge's heels.

DAY 77 Disastrous IE attack hits Windows 10

Lo and behold, IE has suffered a huge security flaw that affects all versions of Windows from Vista to 10 – even if IE isn't your default browser. The flaw lets hackers break into your PC and seize permissions via remote code execution, simply by getting you to visit a malicious web page. Microsoft rushed out a patch on 13 October (www.snipca.com/18297) and recommends that you download it using IE (see News, page 7).

WINDOWS 10 IN NUMBERS

6.63 per cent of PC users were running Windows 10 as their main OS by September, compared with 56.53 per cent for Windows 7 and a hair-raising 12.21 per cent for XP (www.snipca.com/18331).

7 days after the Surface Pro 4 launched, it had sold out.

34 smartphone models support the Windows 10 Mobile Preview; 33 are Lumia models.

99.99 pounds buys you Windows 10 Home edition after 28 July 2016, or if you're upgrading from an OS other than Windows 7 or 8/8.1.

190 countries launched Windows 10 on 29 July. How many can you name?

2,048 Start tiles are supported in Windows 10. Do not try to add them all to your Start menu at once, OK?

110 MILLION devices have installed Windows 10 since July.

1 BILLION is Microsoft's goal for Windows 10 installations. In an online poll (www.snipca.com/18327), 51 per cent of people thought the 1 billion target would be met within three years; 20 per cent thought it would "never happen".

1 BILLION questions have been answered by Cortana, says Microsoft. Cortana's got a good line in witty comebacks: www.snipca.com18329.

650 BILLION web pages have been viewed in Edge – a fraction of the page views nabbed by Chrome.

THE NEXT 100 DAYS – WHAT WE WANT TO SEE

Better privacy controls

Redstone – codename for the public Build due in 2016 – is likely to focus on new features. Shame, because the main thing we want to see from the next 100 days is a better attitude towards users' privacy.

Windows 10 constantly sends data about users' activity back to Microsoft. Following a public outcry, Microsoft attempted to reassure users in a blog post (www.snipca.com/18315). "Information we collect is encrypted in transit," it said. "In transit"? We want our data encrypted on Microsoft's storage servers, too.

Meanwhile, read Microsoft's privacy guidelines (www.snipca.com/18316) and follow the steps in the box, right, to limit what they know about you.

Microsoft tried to reassure its users with a blog post on privacy

Sharper Edge

Edge is a badly missed opportunity. It's fast, yes, but it bizarrely lacks basic browser functions ('Save As' for a web page, for example) and some users report that pages keep freezing. Worse, Bing is the default homepage – an instant turn-off.

Chrome's huge Windows 10 market share suggests that people are much happier to change their OS than their browser. Chrome syncs seamlessly across PCs and devices – and operating systems – in a way Microsoft can only dream of.

To get us to make the leap to Edge, Microsoft must give us compelling features such as those in numerous third-party browsers: a tiny file size like Maxthon Nitro (www.maxthon.com/nitro), USB portability like SlimBrowser (www.slimbrowser.net) or total anonymity like Tor Browser (www.snipca.com/18312).

More Windows tablets and phones

Windows Phone is dead, long live Windows 10 Mobile. Officially, this name change reflects Microsoft's vision for Windows 10 as 'one OS for all devices'. Unofficially, it puts to bed the idea (well, the bald fact) that Windows Phone – while it had its fans – was far less popular than Android and iOS.

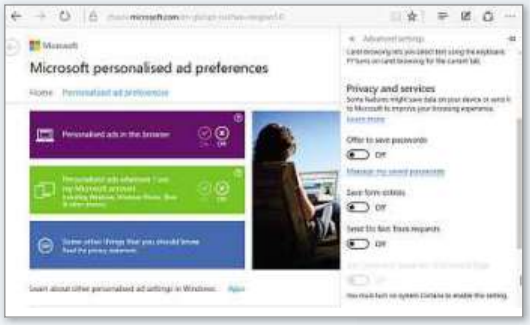
So far, Windows 10 Mobile looks fantastic. Its latest update at the time of writing is Build 10549 (www.snipca.com/18303), which includes an excellent Messaging app that will soon incorporate Skype.

But you need a device to support it, and at the moment Windows-supporting tablets and phones are a small minority, despite a recent spate of device launches (www.snipca.com/18323). We hope many more will follow.

Alternatively, get an Xbox. Microsoft says it plans to upgrade all its Xbox One consoles to Windows 10 over Christmas. So if you don't want to upgrade your computer and you hate fiddly touchscreens, buy an Xbox One and get Windows 10 included. ca

WHAT YOU MUST DO NOW

TIGHTEN YOUR PRIVACY



Microsoft says it monitors your activity to "deliver personalised services... performance, power and convenience" (www.snipca.com/18308). We say it's intrusive and an impertinent use of your bandwidth.

What you must do: If you haven't installed Windows 10 yet, take advantage of the configuration options during setup. Click 'Customise settings' and turn off all the options under Personalisation, Location and 'Browser and protection'. If you've already upgraded, switch off apps' access to your microphone in Settings.

STOP EDGE SPYING

By default, Microsoft records what you type in Edge. If a small company operating out of Russia did that, we'd call it key-logging and alert the spyware police.

What you must do: Type choice.microsoft.com/opt-out in Edge's browser bar, press Enter and then switch off the options on the right. Next, go to Settings, 'View advanced settings', 'Privacy and services' and switch all the sliders to Off (see screenshot above).

STOP AUTO-UPDATES

In Windows 10, you get patches, incremental updates and new Builds automatically. But what if you don't want a particular update?

What you must do: Following pressure from users, Microsoft released a free 'Show or hide updates troubleshooter' tool (www.snipca.com/18311) that lets you configure auto-updates. You can also prevent Windows 10 rebooting without asking (see Workshop, Issue 458).

NEXT ISSUE On sale Wednesday 11 November

ON SALE 11 Nov

GIVE YOUR PC THE **ULTIMATE HEALTH CHECK**

Plus Bring back tools Windows 10 ditched

What boxes to tick in CCleaner

Subscribe to Computeractive at www.getcomputeractive.co.uk

Add **PATCH POWER** to your antivirus

Your antivirus can't work alone – it needs Windows Update. **Jane Hoskyn** reveals why updates are more important than ever, and what you must do now

Patch theory

All software – from your operating system and Office down to apps and plug-ins like Adobe Flash Player ('Flash') – contains security holes. These holes (flaws, bugs, vulnerabilities - different words, same problem) all get discovered eventually. What matters is who discovers them.

If hackers find a hole, they can funnel zero-day malware into your PC. If software engineers find it, they fix it with a patch that you then install via Windows Update or other relevant sources. Luckily, the good guys usually find holes before hackers do.

Adobe Flash is notorious for security holes

Patch reality

But do these patches actually work? Flash is patched repeatedly, but it continues to develop holes. Two days before we went to press, hackers exploited Flash with another new zero day attack called Pawn Storm (www.snipca.com/18346). One day later, Adobe rushed out a patch (www.snipca.com/18347).

Meanwhile, stories abound of flawed Android patches (www.snipca.com/18348) and repeated attempts to patch a Microsoft hole (www.snipca.com/18349). You'd be forgiven for thinking these updates, which eat up hard-drive space, bandwidth and mobile data, don't work.

Patch power proof

Our security team at Dennis Technology Labs (DTL, www.dennistechnologylabs.com) set out to discover whether patches are powerful or pointless. In its latest antivirus megatest, the team checked to see how much difference Windows Update, Java updates and Adobe updates made to security in Windows 7 – and the results were dramatic.

When the team configured Windows Update to install Windows patches automatically, Microsoft Security Essentials (MSE, www.snipca.com/18350) blocked 99 per cent of malware thrown at it. Without Windows Update, MSE only blocked 66 per cent. So a simple settings tweak made the antivirus 33 per cent more effective – an amazing result.

MSE is only available for Windows 7 and Vista, but the results are relevant for everyone because they prove the power of diligent patching. The team admitted they were surprised. "Using Windows Update regularly massively increases the level of protection," DTL's Technical Director Simon Edwards said.

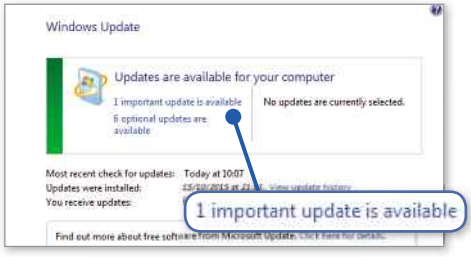
Our lab team found that Windows Update made antivirus far more effective

What you must do

Windows 10 and Android deliver updates automatically (see our Cover Feature, page 50), while many systems and software do not. That doesn't mean you can be complacent in Windows 10 and Android, however.

Whatever version of Windows you're using, go to Windows Update now and make sure it's configured to install updates automatically. Even if it is, there may be 'important updates' (see screenshot below) that you have to install manually.

Do the same on your tablet and phone. Android updates automatically, but check you've got the latest patches anyway by searching for 'update' in Settings and tapping 'System update', then OK. IPad and iPhone receive updates automatically, but to install them you have to enter a password, and many people don't bother. If that sounds like you, you shouldn't be using iOS. Switch to Android or wait for Windows 10 Mobile to ensure you get updates as soon as they're delivered. ca



Check Windows Update for 'important updates', even if it's set to install them automatically

WHICH AV SHOULD YOU USE NOW?

Microsoft Security Essentials' basic protection 66-per-cent score compares badly with other products in our latest antivirus megatest.

Top of the leaderboard, as it has been for two years now, is Kaspersky Internet Security (with 100 per cent). Because it's the best out there, we're selling it for the special price of £19.99 (normally £39.99; see page 68).

Close behind are Norton Security (99 per cent), ESET Smart Security (96 per cent) and, still the best free AV by far, Avast Free Antivirus (94 per cent). You can download Avast for all current versions of Windows from www.avast.com.

Whatever AV you choose, never enable more than one at the same time. They will 'conflict' – effectively cancel each other out.

To see the antivirus megatest results for 2015, go to www.dennistechnologylabs.com and click the PDF link under 'Home Anti-Virus Protection Annual Report 2015'. To read more about how Windows Update boosts your AV, click the PDF link under 'Windows Updates vs Web Threats'.

Don't pay for Office 2016

Microsoft Office 2016 is a fantastic program with a hefty price tag. **Jonathan Parkyn** reveals how to get its best features for free

If you read our review of Office 2016 in Issue 460, you'll know what we think about it. In short, it's great – but it's not cheap.

Microsoft's new office suite will set you back at least £120 for a standalone version (Home and Student). If you opt for an Office 365 Personal or Home subscription plan, it'll cost £60 or £80 per year respectively. But Office 2016 is far from being your only option – there are several free office suites that offer equivalent features for free. Here we reveal the best of the bunch.

Online collaboration

Word 2016 lets users collaborate on documents in real time. In other words, you and a friend or colleague can be working on the same document and see each other's changes as they're made. It's a brilliant feature that makes it really easy to work together with multiple users over the web.

But real-time collaboration is nothing new. Users of Google Docs, Sheets and Slides have been doing it for years – for free. Log in at https://docs.google.com and open a new or existing document, then click Share in the top-right corner. Under People, type the email addresses of the people or Google Groups you want to collaborate with, choose 'Can edit' as the access type and click Send (see screenshot left).

Collaborate and chat in real time when you share Google Docs, Sheets or Slides

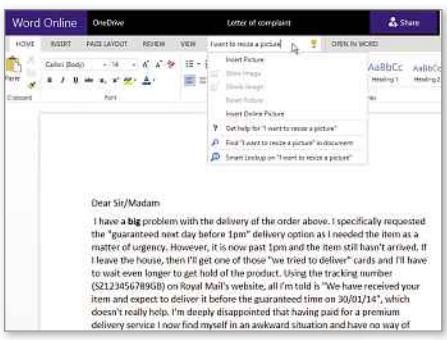
If you and your collaborator are online and working on the same document at the same time, you'll be able to see the other person's changes as they are made and vice versa.

Better still, as long as you're both signed in with a Google account, you can even chat with each other as you work. Simply click the speech-bubble icon at the top right and start typing.

Help boxes in plain English

One of the best new features in Office 2016 is the 'Tell me what you want to do' box that appears on the top toolbar.

These boxes are a nifty way to find features and tools without digging around in the Ribbon. You don't even need to know the name of the tool you're trying to find. Simply type what you



Office 2016's handy 'Tell me...' boxes can also be found in the free Office Online

'OFFICE 2016 FOR FREE'?

If you've seen adverts or emails offering free copies of Office 2016, they are not to be trusted and are likely to be phishing scams. Big new software launches, like Office 2016, are a con-man's dream because they provide new opportunities for tempting people into parting with personal information. For more on scams like these, see page 60.

The truth is you can't get Office 2016 for free. Microsoft may have offered Windows 10 for free, but that doesn't mean the company has become a charity. Prior to its full launch you could download a free preview version of Office 2016 to help Microsoft test the software, but the full version is very definitely available on a paid-for basis only.

FREE FEATURES YOU WON'T FIND IN OFFICE 2016

Office 2016 still hasn't got these features – but you'll find them for free elsewhere...

- **Support for older versions of Windows**
  Office 2016 only works on Windows 7 or later, while LibreOffice (www.libreoffice.org, see screenshot) runs happily on older versions, including XP and Vista.
- **Familiar interface**
  Still hate the Ribbon? LibreOffice sticks to classic toolbars and menu structures that are much more familiar to users of older Office versions.
- **As many installs as you like**
  Office 2016 (Home and Student editions) only lets you install the software on one PC. Office 365 Home allows up to five installs. In contrast, you can install LibreOffice on an unlimited number of PCs.
- **Less hard-drive space**
  Office 2016 gobbles up 3GB of storage when you install it. LibreOffice takes up around half that. And, if you opt for Google Drive or Microsoft's Office web apps, they take up no hard-drive space whatsoever.

- **Portable version**
  Want to be able to take your office suite everywhere with you and run it on any PC from a USB stick? LibreOffice comes in a portable version (www.snipca.com/18164). Office doesn't.
- **Buy our next issue for more LibreOffice tips**

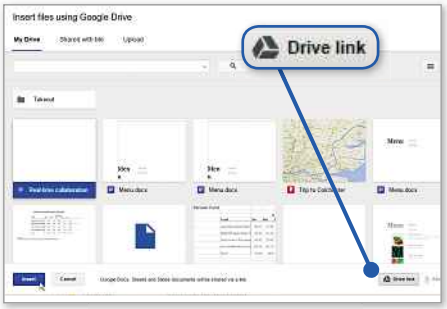
want to do in plain English – 'I want to resize a photo', for example – and you're presented with a list of tools that can do the job.

Another great idea, but again not new. The 'Tell me...' boxes have been part of Microsoft's free online Office apps for a while now. Log in at https://onedrive.live.com and open a document in the Word or Excel Online app, and you'll find a 'Tell me...' box next to the Ribbon tabs. It works in the same way too – just start typing your question for options.

Get instant confirmation

Highlight and right-click any word or phrase in Word, PowerPoint, Excel or Outlook 2016, select Smart Lookup (see screenshot below), and the Insights pane will open on the right-hand side. This pane provides you with instant research material, such as search links and Wikipedia information under the Explore tab, and dictionary definitions of the word/phrase under Define.

Once again, this self-same tool is available in Microsoft's free-to-use Online Office tools. Google Docs has a very similar feature, too. Highlight and right-click a word or phrase in a Google document, then select either Research or Define for a pop-up pane of relevant information.



Gmail lets you send Google Drive files as links instead of attachments

Share files as links

If you want to share a file in your OneDrive cloud storage, you no longer need to download or sync the file to your own PC before attaching it to an email. In Outlook 2016 you can simply choose your OneDrive account from the Attach File dropdown menu and send the file as a link instead. Your recipient will then be able to grab the very latest version of the file directly from your OneDrive.

Gmail already lets you do something very similar with Google Drive files, for free. When composing a Gmail message, instead of clicking the paper-clip icon to attach a file, click the Google Drive icon. Select your file, make sure the 'Drive link' option is selected in the bottom right, then click Insert (see screenshot left).

Cut inbox clutter

Outlook 2016 has a new tool called Clutter that lets you filter low-priority emails and keep your inbox manageable. It's great – in theory. But the feature is only available to Office 2016 business users with full access to Office 365 online.

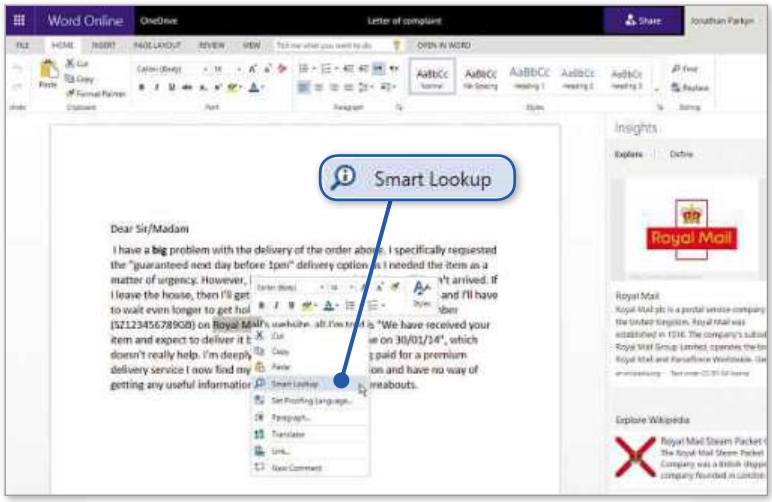
Gmail has used a similar system for a couple of years now. According to your preferences, it sorts your emails into tabs (Primary, Social, Promotions and more). You don't have to be a business user or pay anything to use this feature.

Restore old versions of files

Another Office 2016 feature that's only available to business users is the ability to view and retrieve previous versions of files, so you can restore an older version if you make a mistake or want to return to an earlier draft.

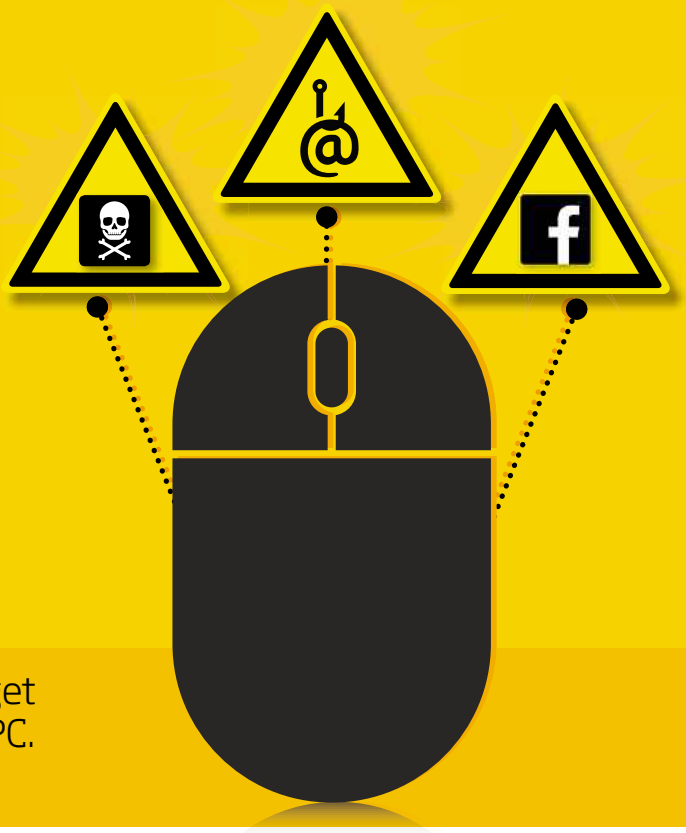
Dropbox already provides this for all its users, whether or not you've upgraded to paid storage. Just right-click a file and select Previous Versions to see a list of all the versions available for that file.

Similarly, in a Google Drive document, spreadsheet, presentation or drawing, open the file, click File and then click 'See revision history'. ca



Right-click a word and select Smart Lookup in Word Online for a panel of useful info

What you must NEVER 'CLICK'



Phishing is still hackers' favoured method to get malware – including ransomware – into your PC. **Jonathan Parkyn** reveals their latest tricks

Poor Hillary Clinton. As if running for US President wasn't stressful enough, Mrs Clinton has reportedly been plagued by phishing emails. These included fake notifications of parking violations containing malware that could have let hackers gain access to her precious PC (read about it at www.snipca.com/18184).

But you don't have to be in the running for the White House to be the target of scams like these. Most of us have been on the receiving end of similar emails, and many have been caught out by fake adverts, dodgy apps and hoax updates. As we said in our Cover Feature in Issue 460, your antivirus (AV) can only do so much to protect you from these attacks – especially those that exploit your trust so cunningly that you simply wave them through directly into your hard drive, telling your AV that it's all OK.

Your best line of defence, then, is knowing what not to trust. Here we outline the latest threats to watch out for.

Fake £1 iPhone adverts

The police and the National Trading Standards eCrime team recently began warning consumers about fake adverts claiming that Apple was offering new iPhones for £1 (www.snipca.com/18182).

The ads, which appear mainly on social networking sites such as Facebook, lead people to what looks like a BBC News page about how UK shoppers have discovered "a loophole to get the new iPhone for only £1". It is, of course, a complete load of cobblers.

This particular scam is known as a

This Facebook advert for a cheap iPhone is a 'subscription trap' that could cost you dear

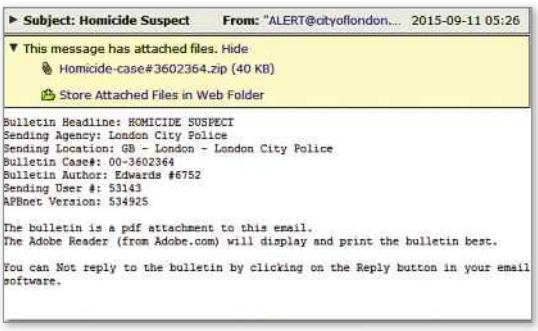
'subscription trap'. Users are hoodwinked into parting with a relatively insignificant amount of money – such as £1 – only to discover further down the line they've actually signed up for indefinite ongoing monthly payments (often for much more significant amounts), which can be difficult to stop.

The fake iPhone ad is just one example of the many ways scammers try to tempt us with offers of cheap or free stuff. If a site or an email offers something at an unbelievable price (often with claims like "retailers hate this!"), then it's likely to be just that – unbelievable. Similar scams involve notifications of sudden windfalls and HMRC tax rebates. Don't click any of it. If it looks like it comes from a company that you recognise or regularly use, then follow it up with them directly, using the company's official contact details – not phone numbers or links in the email or advert.

'Homicide Suspect' police emails

We all know not to click anything we receive in unsolicited emails, right? So fraudsters have to try harder, by catching you off guard or shocking you into clicking something that you'd normally give a wide berth.

Last month, for example, the City of London Police began warning of a spoof email claiming to come from – ironically – the "London City Police" with the subject line 'Homicide Suspect'. The message is intentionally vague but looks official, and appears to suggest the recipient's involvement in some kind of serious crime. The only way to find out more is to click the attached 'bulletin'. But it isn't a bulletin at all; it's malware that immediately installs itself and allows hackers to gain access to your PC.



The Homicide Suspect email from "London City Police" is a malware booby trap

iOS alerts with phone numbers

Many people assume iPads and iPhones are safe from online threats, but this is not the case. Take the recent spate of fake iPhone and iPad notifications that users have reported. These pop-ups appear in Safari, looking for all the world like official device notifications from Apple and other companies.

One that's currently doing the rounds comes in the shape of a crash report, telling you there's something wrong with your device and advising you to call Apple Technical Support on an 0800 number (see screenshot below). This number doesn't take you to Apple – it's a lure to get you to give away personal and financial information to hackers. Similar iOS pop-up scams include notifications about phoney (no pun intended) updates.

Fake Apple alerts try to trick you into giving away personal information

Thankfully, there's a quick way to get rid of these. Tap Settings and switch on Airplane Mode. Tap Settings again, then Safari, then 'Clear History and Website Data'. You should also make sure 'Block Pop-ups' and Fraudulent Website Warning are switched on. Turn Airplane Mode off and open Safari.

Apps from outside Google's Play Store

In Issue 460's Cover Feature we revealed that ransomware has leapt from PCs to phones and tablets. Android-targetting ransomware Koler, for example, locks you out of your device and displays a fake alert from the police or FBI telling you your device has been used for some kind of illegal activity (pirated software and child pornography are common accusations). The alert then demands that you pay a 'fine' to regain control of your device.

The only way ransomware like Koler can infect Android devices is by conning you into installing it, which it does by masquerading as an app. Google has been very vigilant about kicking illegitimate apps out of the Play Store, so the best way to avoid getting infected is to only install apps from the official store.

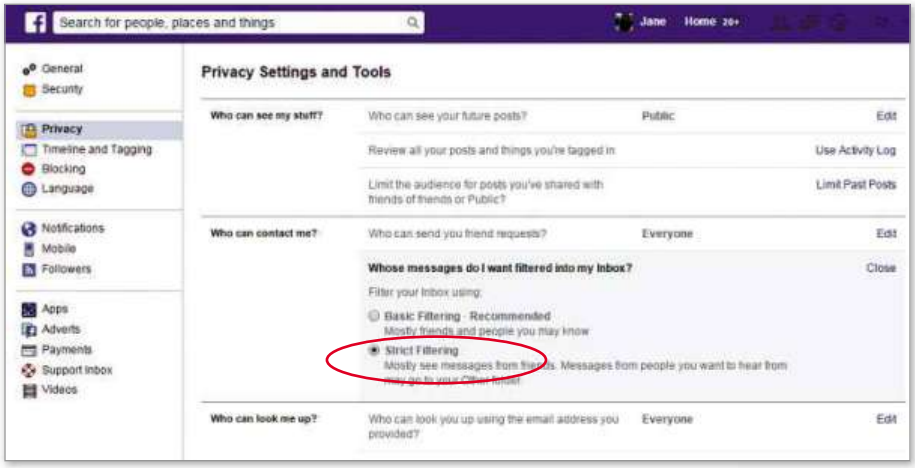
Similar warnings and demands for fines have recently appeared on iPhone and iPad screens. These can usually be disabled by blocking pop-ups using the steps above (see box). Suffice to say, never click, tap or pay any fines, no matter what device you're using.

Facebook messages from strangers

Cyber criminals have long used 'spear phishing' techniques to target small businesses. They gather information about individual employees, then use this to send malware-embedded emails. Now, hackers are using the same techniques on everyday users, mainly through social networking sites.

Scammers don't need a degree in rocket science to gather your personal details and craft a convincing scam that appears to be from someone you know. If you receive a Facebook 'friend' request from someone you've never heard of, or an unexpected request for help or money – even if it appears to come from a friend or family member – it may well be a spear phishing attack. Always treat any message asking for sensitive information with extreme caution.

Be careful what you reveal in public posts, tweets and status updates. Also tighten your security and privacy settings to limit the people who can contact you. In Facebook, go to Settings, Privacy, then click Edit under 'Whose messages do I want filtered' and click Strict Filtering (see screenshot below). ca



Tighten your Facebook privacy settings so only friends can contact you

WHY YOUR AD-BLOCKER WON'T SAVE YOU

Advert-blocking extensions such as Adblock Plus (https://adblockplus.org, see screenshot) remove most adverts from web pages you visit – including fake adverts that might otherwise lure you into a phishing trap.

However, it's important to remember that no ad-blocker is a silver bullet. For a start, even the most powerful tools can't block all adverts – only those included in their built-in filters. Scammers are quick to adapt to such filters and find workarounds that ensure their adverts appear anyway. Worse still, some malicious adverts are designed to install their toxic wares on your PC even if you don't click them.

Then you need to bear in mind not all

phishing scams are triggered via adverts on web pages. Many are delivered via fake notifications, emails and more. And while your email provider or AV may block malicious attachments, a cunningly worded or convincing fake message is often all it takes to fool you into downloading a dangerous file.

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STEP 3 Choose whether to create an optional Zinio account

STEP 4 Enter your Apple ID password to confirm

Subscribe to *Computeractive* today and save on the single issue price

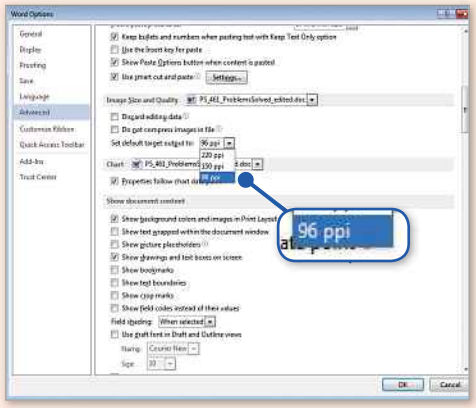
Problems Solved

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Why won't BT email let me send a Word document?

Q I've been trying to send a two-page Word document via my BT email service. Every time I have received the following error: "Message size exceeds limit." Surely it's not asking the impossible to send a simple two-page document by email? I contacted the BT help desk and all they said was to cut down the file size. I eventually managed to send the document by splitting it in two and sending it in separate emails, but surely there is a way of overcoming this fault? I am using Windows 7 on a pretty standard PC.

John Rowntree



If you are unable to send a Word document due to its size, you could tweak the image resolution

A There are several possibilities here, but start by checking the size of the document. In Windows 7, press Control (Ctrl)+E to launch Windows Explorer, navigate to the relevant folder, right-click the document and choose Properties. Check the Size field on the General tab. For reasons that'll become apparent, our guess is that the document is either something over 5MB in size or (less likely) over 20MB.

BT's email service applies a limit on attachments of 25MB. However, it carries some digital 'overhead', so the practical limit is lower – any file over around 20MB could trigger it. If BT's mail server receives such an attachment, it'll simply bounce it back to the sender (you) with an error message like the one you mention.

But this message probably isn't from BT. Your recipient's email service will have its own attachment limits and, even in this day and age, many internet service providers (ISPs) still apply paltry limits as low as 5MB – and we reckon that's the problem here. Does your document contain some images? A two-page Word file with a few pictures could tip the 5MB mark, though it's very unlikely to reach as high as 20MB.

So what can you do about it? You could ask the recipient for an alternative email address (the likes of Outlook.com and Gmail allow attachments of up to 25MB), or you could tweak the document to shrink the images. In Word, click File followed by Options and then Advanced. Scroll down to the 'Image Size and Quality' setting, ensure that 'Do not compress images in file' is not ticked and then choose a lower resolution from the 'Set default target output to' dropdown menu.

If lower-resolution images aren't an acceptable solution for you, or your recipient doesn't have an alternative email service, then you could make use of the free BT Cloud storage that comes with your BT account. Download the BT Cloud program from www.btcloud.bt.com, then log in using your BT credentials. Copy the document to the BT Cloud Sync folder this creates, then select the file, click 'share' in the BT Cloud program and either click Email to launch your default email program with the download link pasted into a new-message window, or click 'Copy share link' to copy it to the Windows Clipboard – and then paste it wherever you want by pressing Control (Ctrl)+V.

How do I edit my Android dictionary?

Q I have an Android smartphone that I've recently upgraded to Lollipop (Android 5.1). My problem is that my phone has remembered lots of misspellings I've made over the years, so when I'm typing the suggestions will sometimes be quite silly – like 'baguwtte' instead of 'baguette', for example. I know I made that mistake once when typing a shopping list, but I've no idea how to stop my phone showing this as a suggestion. Any clues?

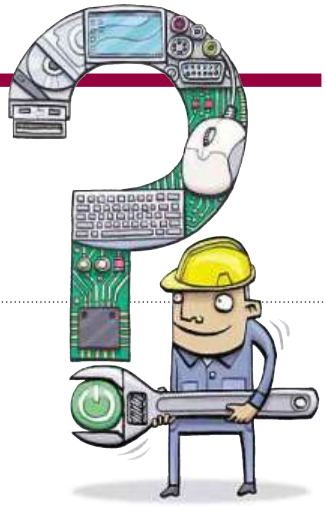
James Parker

A Yes, you just need to edit the personal dictionary, which is easy – when you know how.

From your smartphone's home screen tap Settings followed by 'Language & input'. Next, tap 'Personal dictionary' followed by the relevant language – which we can assume to be 'English (United Kingdom)'. You'll now see a list of everything that's been added to your personal dictionary. Tap a misspelled entry and then either correct it by tapping its field and typing, or tap the dustbin icon at the top right. Repeat as needed.

While you're here, see the little plus ('+') sign at the top-right. If you tap this you can add new words and, better still, include a shortcut if you want. For example, type 'bgt' in the Shortcut field under your entry for 'baguette' and in future typing 'bgt' will be substituted with the full word.

Remove misspelled words by editing an Android phone's personal dictionary



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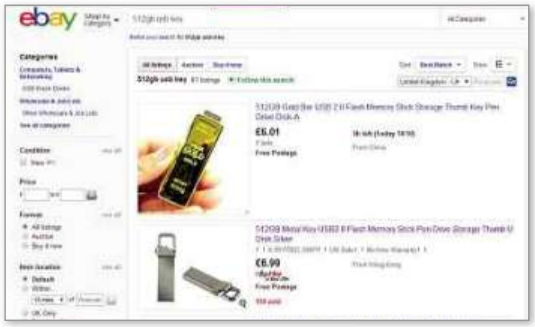
Why does my USB stick corrupt files?

Q I bought a low-cost 512GB USB memory stick from eBay. At first all was fine and I was delighted. But several months down the line it seems to have developed a fault, corrupting any new files that I put on to it (although oddly, existing files still work). I formatted it and that seemed to fix the problem, but the problem recurred as it filled up. I tried to contact the seller, but their eBay account has been closed. Is there any way to fix this problem?

Michael Clarke



Beware of purchasing 'fake' USB sticks – low capacity USB sticks that have had their firmware hacked

A Sadly, no. From your description of the device and problem, we're convinced that you've bought a 'fake' USB stick, sales of which are rife.

This is a common scam. Fly-by-night vendors buy large quantities of small-capacity USB sticks and then hack their firmware so that they report themselves to Windows (or other operating systems) as having much more capacity than they really do. So, for example, a 16GB stick can be made to look like a 512GB one.

Worse, these drives even appear to work – at least until their real capacity is reached. At that point – and depending on how the firmware was modified – the drive might simply refuse to work, or it might continue to accept new files, but create folder/file names absent of actual data.

This is all part of the scam: because the drive works at first, purchasers won't complain initially. Indeed, they might even provide the vendor with positive feedback, fuelling further sales. By the time the problem reveals itself, the vendor is usually long gone; or rather, will have risen from the ashes Phoenix-like to begin trading under a new name.

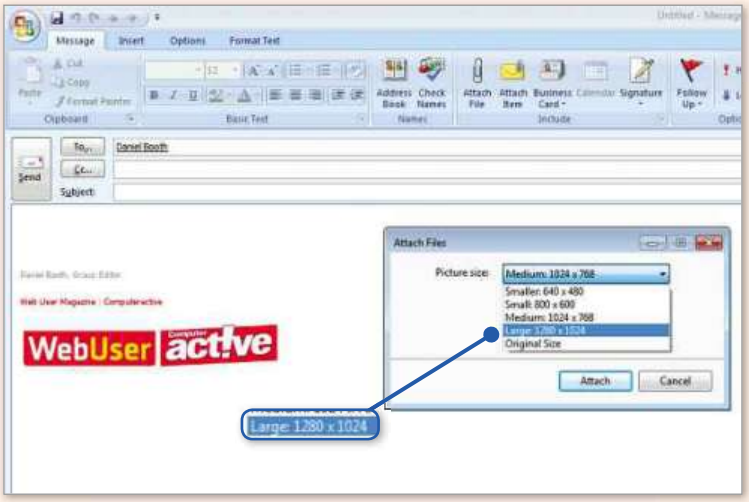
There's nothing you can do to fix your USB stick, but you might be able to lodge a claim for a refund under eBay's Money Back Guarantee scheme, at www.snipca.com/17908. Don't be put off by the suggestion that you need to have reported the problem within 30 days of purchase, because you've likely been a victim of fraud, so eBay's extended-timeline rules should apply. If you need more help, contact our Consumeractive team (**consumeractive@computeractive.co.uk**).

For the benefit of other readers, spotting fake USB sticks is a case of cross-checking pricing with brand-name models. If an equivalent-capacity generic model is suspiciously cheap, be suspicious!

How do I resize images for email in Windows 7?

Q When I used Windows XP and Outlook Express, there were two ways to attach photos to emails. Within the email itself, one could click the Attach button and the photo was sent at the full size of the saved photo. Alternatively, to send it as a smaller attachment, one could start with the photo itself and right-click it, then Send To followed by Mail Recipient – and one was then given the option of sending it much smaller. However, with Windows Live Mail under Windows 7, while I can see an option for 'Large', I cannot see any way to shrink the images. I often need to send small images, so is there any way to do this with my current setup?

Morley Pecker



To resize images to send as email attachments in Windows 7, click the 'Large 1280 x 1024' option and then choose your desired size

A Yes, and you might kick yourself, because the answer is more or less staring you in the face.

After you've right-clicked and selected 'send to' and 'mail recipient', you see the Attach Files dialogue box with 'Large 1280 x 1024' as the size. This dialogue box looks quite different to the one in Windows XP, which offered two simple buttons – one of which was a delightfully plain 'Make all my pictures smaller'.

That's probably what threw you off the scent of the solution in Windows 7. Instead, you need to click 'Large 1280 x 1024' alongside 'Picture size' to open a menu with other size options. Select one and then click Attach.

Problems Solved

Why can't I install Dashlane?

Q When I recently tried to install the Dashlane password manager I got the message: "C:\Users\David\AppData\Roaming\Dashlane\Dashlane.exe. Your system administrator has blocked this program. For more information, contact your system administrator". What's going on here?

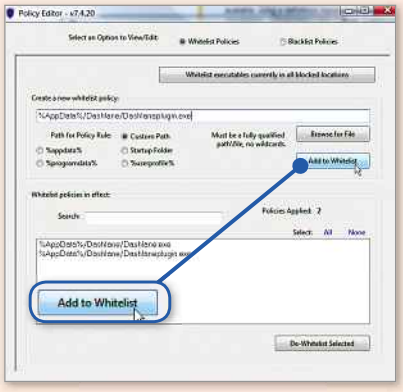
David Clark

A We think at some point in the past you've installed the free CryptoPrevent tool (from www.snipca.com/17985), which fends off CryptoLocker ransomware. We guess this because Dashlane itself acknowledges that CryptoPrevent can stop Dashlane from working.

You can fix it by adding an exception for Dashlane in CryptoPrevent. Launch CryptoPrevent, then open the Advanced menu and choose Software Restriction Policy Editor (or Whitelist in older versions).

From there, you can view whitelisted items and whitelist your own items. In the 'Create a new whitelist policy' field, type %AppData%/Dashlane/Dashlane.exe and then click the 'Add to Whitelist' button. Next, type %AppData%/Dashlane/Dashlaneplugin.exe and click 'Add to Whitelist'.

Dashlane recommends disabling CryptoPrevent's 'Silent blocking' option to see if the program stops any other Dashlane processes. Find this by clicking the Show More Advanced Options entry on the Advanced menu.



To get Dashlane working properly, add it to CryptoPrevent's whitelist

How do I extend my Wi-Fi signal?

Q I live in a retirement complex that provides me with a rather-weak Wi-Fi connection to the internet. While this is adequate to connect my PC, the signal does not seem strong enough to allow the connection of my Sony smart TV to the network. Can you think of anything I could do to make full use of my smart TV?

Brian Cole-Hamilton

A Wi-Fi extender can be used to increase the range of the signal you get from a router

A Yes, what you need is a Wi-Fi extender – a device that 'captures' a Wi-Fi signal and then rebroadcasts it. You position the extender in a spot where you can receive the Wi-Fi signal (near your PC, presumably) and it then serves as an electromagnetic stepping stone to extend the incoming Wi-Fi signal's radio waves so that they reach your TV.

There are loads to choose from, ranging widely in price. This Netgear model (£23 from Amazon: www.snipca.com/17994) is cheap but effective. If your budget stretches further, consider Netgear's faster, more powerful Nighthawk (£125 from Amazon: www.snipca.com/18165).

If you're permitted access to your complex's router, then configuration could be as simple as pressing the Wi-Fi Protected Setup (WPS) button on both the extender and the router. If not, you'll be able to do it manually by connecting the extender to the router in much the same way as you would any other Wi-Fi device. The exact process depends on the device you buy, but it'll take just a couple of minutes via a web browser on your PC.

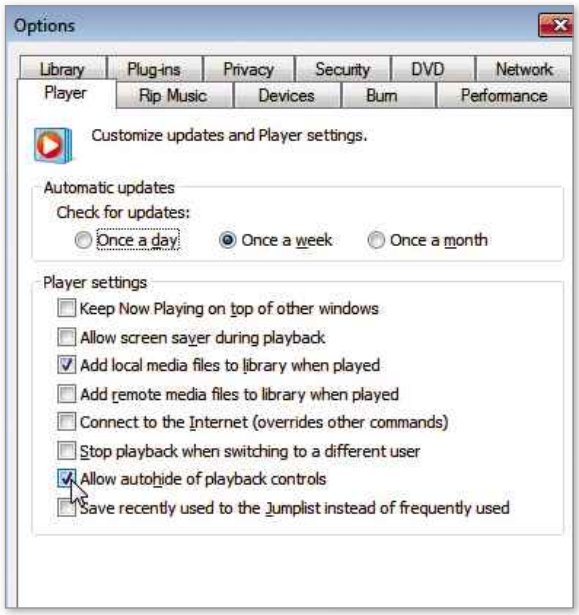
How do I capture stills from videos?

Q I captured a video on my iPad and emailed it to my Windows 7 PC. I want to convert one frame into a photograph, for printing. How do I do this?

Richard S Crighton

A In Windows Media Player (WMP) on your PC, start playback, then click the diagonal arrow at the bottom right to watch in full screen. Next, click pause, wait for the playback controls to hide and then hit the Print Screen (PrtScn) key on your keyboard. Now just press Ctrl+V to paste it into whichever application you're going to use to print (for example, Microsoft Paint – find it on the Start menu).

If the playback controls don't disappear after a few seconds, make sure your cursor is in the main playback window. If they still don't disappear, click Alt to show WMP's menu then choose Options from the Tools menu. Select the Player tab, tick 'Allow autohide of playback controls', then click OK.



Tick the 'Allow autohide of playback controls' box to remove the playback controls when capturing stills from videos

Why does my PC display an advert before Windows launches?

Remove a 'splash screen' advert from the manufacturer of your PC's motherboard by deleting the revelant option in the BIOS

Q My desktop computer now displays a banner that says 'Gigabyte - Insist on Ultra Durable', even before Windows 7 launches. It then goes and Windows 7 opens and functions normally. My computer is protected by Kaspersky 2015 Internet Security, which I keep updated. It has not detected any viruses. Could you advise what has caused this to happen, and what steps need to be taken to get rid of what seems to be an advert?

Alan Turner

A You're seeing a 'splash screen', which is indeed an advert – from the manufacturer of your computer's motherboard. The commercial was literally built in to the motherboard's firmware when it was manufactured.

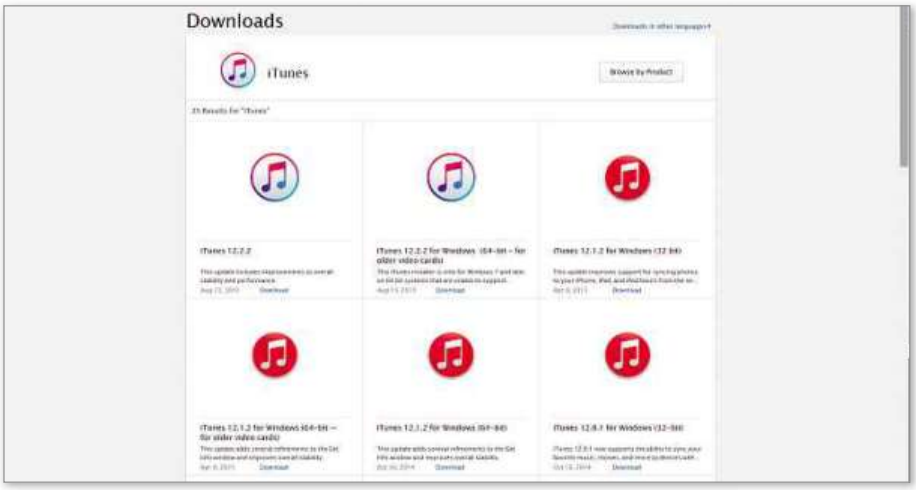
There's absolutely nothing malicious about this and it should be easily disabled in the BIOS, though it is a bit odd that it started happening all of a sudden. Had you been exploring the BIOS, perhaps? It's also possible that a mains-electricity spike, crash or bad shutdown could've caused this.

We don't know your motherboard model, but it's made by Gigabyte so you could look up precise instructions on the company's website, at www.gigabyte.us. However, it'll be no more difficult than pressing F2 or Delete (Del) after switching on, then using the cursor (arrow) keys and Enter to look for the relevant option – probably called 'Logo at startup', 'Splash screen', 'Quiet boot' or similar. Set it to Disabled or Off (or Enabled and On for 'Quiet boot'), then save and exit (usually by pressing the Escape/Esc key).

Why can't I install iTunes on my PC?

Q I treated myself to a new iPhone 6 and used it to sign up for a free trial of Apple Music. I wanted to use this on my PC also so I tried to install iTunes, but it failed repeatedly, telling me that I needed at least Windows 7. I don't understand this because I have previously had iTunes installed on my Vista PC and it ran perfectly. I know I should probably upgrade my PC to Windows 10, but it does everything I want as it is, so I don't really want to change it. Is there any way to get iTunes running on my Vista PC, or even just the old version that I used? If not, how do I get the free upgrade to Windows 10?

Malcolm Forsyth



The most recent version of iTunes to work with Vista doesn't include access to Apple Music

A We'll answer your questions in reverse order, because you need to understand right away that Windows Vista users are not entitled to a free upgrade to Windows 10 – so that's not going to be an option unless you're prepared to stump up £99.99 to buy Windows 10 and upgrade your Vista PC, which will then let you install the latest version of iTunes. You can get Windows 10 direct from Microsoft at www.snipca.com/17943, either on a USB stick or as a download. However, do click the Requirements to check that your PC is up to the job.

If not, Apple does offer many older versions of iTunes for download from www.snipca.com/17944. The most recent and last version to work with Vista is 12.1.2, but this doesn't include access to Apple Music. Unless Apple changes its mind and reintroduces support for Windows Vista with later editions of iTunes, there's no way to fix this.

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE 11 Nov

- Why has Windows Photo Gallery stopped working?
- How do I enable Taskbar thumbnail previews?
- What's this Android error?

...And many more

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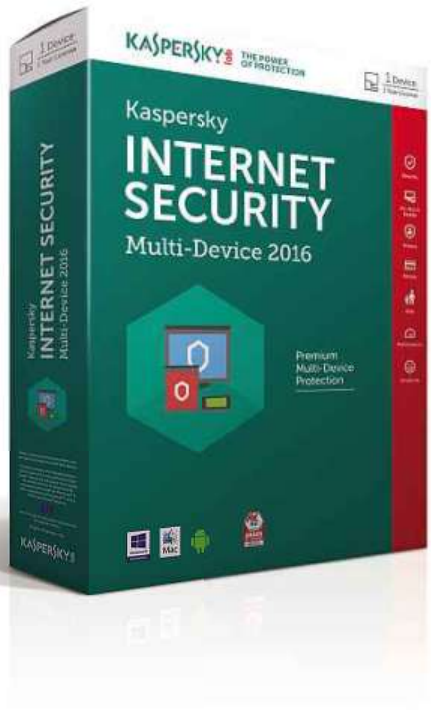

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WINNER OF THE PAST 6 *COMPUTERACTIVE* ANTIVIRUS TESTS

Avast

Fix broken updates, stop false positives and discover the hidden Repair mode

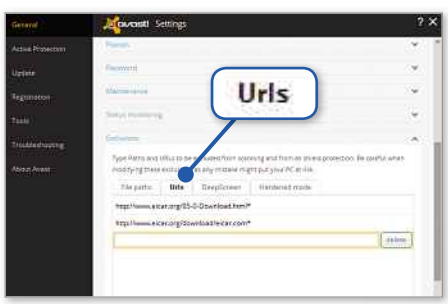
Programs, websites or email run slowly

Avast has a real-time scanning mode called Active Protection that checks program launches, sent and received emails and visited websites. If you've updated the program this could have enabled new options or ones that you'd previously disabled. You can tweak these options to speed up specific activities, or reduce the program's optimisation to speed everything up – potentially reducing levels of protection.

Click Settings, Active Protection, then either move the various On switches to Off, or click Customize to disable only some aspects. For example, click Customize alongside Mail Shield then remove the tick from 'Scan outbound mail (SMTP)', because this feature protects other people's PCs – not yours. Then click Scan, 'Scan for viruses', Settings, then click Sensitivity and click a lower bar on the 'Heuristics sensitivity' chart.

Safe items flagged as unsafe

No antivirus program is perfect, and Avast will sometimes flag a file or website as unsafe even when it isn't (known as a 'false positive' result). This could affect Word documents containing your own macros, for example. You should always research suspect items using Google, but once you're certain something is safe, you can add it as an exception to stop Avast from repeatedly flagging it as a threat. Click Settings, General, then Exclusions. To exclude a file, click 'File paths' followed by 'browse', or to exclude a website click Urls then type or paste the URL and press Enter.



Add exclusions to prevent Avast repeatedly flagging files and websites you know are safe

Avast won't update automatically or manually

Have you checked that the program is set to apply updates automatically? Click Scan, followed by General, then Update. Under Virus Definitions, click Settings then select 'Automatic updates'. Click the Update button above that. Now scroll down to Program, click Settings, select 'Automatic updates', and click the Update button there. If it still doesn't update, use Avast's hidden Repair option. Open the Windows Control Panel, then click Programs followed by 'Uninstall a program'. Click to select Avast, then click Uninstall. Now click Repair, followed by Continue, then follow the prompts.

Open the Windows Control Panel to discover Avast's hidden Repair feature

Some files could not be scanned

This usually happens when files are encrypted or password-protected, preventing Avast from scanning their contents – but there could be other reasons. Click 'Show results' followed by Warnings and then look in the Status column to see the problem. If the file was moved to Avast's Virus Chest, click Scan followed by 'Quarantine (Virus Chest)' and then double-click the relevant file. Note down the information displayed in the Properties box, then enter this into Google for more information. If your problem is that Avast won't scan compressed files, read the next fix.

Compressed files are bypassed by scan

By default, Avast doesn't scan the contents of compressed files (such as those with a .zip or .rar file extension), so this isn't a fault in the program. However, you can change this behaviour by clicking Scan, followed by 'Scan for viruses', and then Settings followed by Packers. Tick 'All packers' then click OK.

Software Updater isn't working properly

In the free version of Avast the Software Updater must be run manually, so click Scan, followed by 'Scan for outdated software', followed by the appropriate Update buttons. If you're using a paid-for version of Avast, but some programs still aren't updating, check that you haven't inadvertently clicked the Ignore Updates link. If so, click 'Stop ignoring'. If the updates still won't work, click Settings at the foot of the Software Updater page then click 'Database reset (troubleshooting)', followed by 'Reset database now' and then Yes to confirm.

Games interrupted by alerts

Avast's real-time protection can be a problem when playing full-screen games, because its pop-up alerts interrupt your enjoyment or stop a game from running correctly. The fix isn't to disable Avast but to enable 'Silent/Gaming Mode', as this suppresses the program's alerts while keeping your PC protected. Do this by right-clicking the Avast icon in the Windows Taskbar and ticking the Silent/Gaming Mode option, or in the General tab under Settings in the main program interface.

Stop Avast interrupting full-screen games by ticking the Silent/Gaming Mode box

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Jargon Buster

1080p Of the common types of high-definition video, this is the best quality: 1920x1080 pixels.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

720p A common resolution of high-definition video: 1280x720 pixels.

Add-on See Extensions.

AMOLED Active-Matrix Organic Light-Emitting Diode. An alternative technology to LCD for creating flat-panel displays. Most commonly used in smartphones, tablets and smartwatches.

Beta A version of software that's being tested. Beta versions are often released so problems can be ironed out.

BIOS Basic Input-Output System. Essential software built into every PC that connects the vital components.

Bookmarklet A small, very simple program stored as a bookmark in your web browser.

Bootable A DVD with system files on it so it can be used to start up your computer.

Botnet A group of infected computers connected together via the internet, and used to infect other PCs, send junk email and perform other criminal tasks.

CPU Central Processing Unit. Another term for a computer processor.

Defragment To reorganise the data stored on a hard drive so files are stored in one piece and can be accessed quickly.

DisplayPort A new socket for connecting monitors that's still relatively rare.

Distro A version of the Linux OS and the programs that go with it.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with a peripheral device.

DVI Digital Visual Interface. A common type of display connector that can carry a digital signal.

EXE A program file designed to run in Windows. Named after the file extension .exe.

Extension A program that adds extra features to your browser.

F/1.9 F-stop Sometimes F-number. This is a measure of a camera's aperture; how much light can enter the lens at once, as measured in terms relative to the focal length.

Factory settings The original system state of an electronic device. You can restore a device to this state by erasing all the information stored on it and returning its software to its original manufacturer settings.

False positive When an antivirus program wrongly detects a malware infection.

Firmware Basic software stored on a device, such as a music player, to control its operation. Can sometimes be upgraded in a process often called flashing.

Flash memory A type of memory that can retain information without a power source. Used in memory cards, USB sticks and other storage devices.

Force Touch A feature created by Apple that senses the level of force exerted on a touchpad or touchscreen to control various functions.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals. It is found on many new TVs, media PCs and high-definition products such as Blu-ray disc players and the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 games consoles.

HTML Hypertext Markup Language. The language used to build most web pages.

Macro An automated series of commands or options that can be run at any time. Handy if you often need to perform repetitive actions.

Megapixel A measure of the amount of detail that can be recorded by a digital image. A one-megapixel image is made up of a million dots (pixels).

Micro HDMI A miniature version of HDMI often found on smartphones and tables.

MicroSD A small type of memory card. Can be converted to SD size using an adapter.

MicroUSB A miniature version of USB, often found on smartphones, tablets and portable hard drives.

Mini-ITX Low-powered motherboard, commonly used in high-end home-theatre PCs and gaming PCs.

Motherboard The main circuit board inside every PC into which all other parts connect.

NAS Network-attached storage. A hard drive attached to a network that can be shared by other PCs.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone, rather than just by the employees of the company that created it.

Patch Software file that fixes problems with an existing program.

PCI Peripheral Component Interconnect. A high-performance expansion slot for desktop PCs.

PCI Express A faster version of PCI, used by modern graphics cards.

Phishing A form of internet fraud that tries to trick you into revealing personal details.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to your web browser or to other applications, and is loaded only when it's needed.

Processor The processor – or central processing unit – is the brain of a computer.

Product key A unique serial number. Issued by software companies. It must be typed by the user before an application will launch for the first time.

PUP Potentially Unwanted Program. A program that may not be desired, despite the user consenting to it being downloaded. Examples include unnecessary plug-ins, toolbars and browser hijackers.

Quad core A computer that has four processors on a single chip, which allows it to operate faster than single-core computers.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

Ransomware Malware run by hackers who take over your PC and demand a payment to release it.

Remote code execution When a hacker is able to start a program running on a remote computer.

Resolution The amount of detail shown in an image, whether on screen or printed.

Server A computer on a network that distributes information to other PCs.

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors, printers and the internet.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts. Faster but more expensive than conventional hard drives.

Tag A keyword used to describe a file or web page. Many programs use tags to organise related information quickly.

TV tuner An expansion card that, when fitted into a PC, receives TV signals.

USB 2.0 Faster successor to USB that's used by devices such as external hard drives.

USB 3.0 An even faster version of the USB standard.

Zero-day malware A malware that exploits a previously unknown software flaw.

ZIP file A file that can contain a number of compressed documents or files.

Bust more jargon on our Back Issue CD: www.snipca.com/14981

The Final Straw

STUART ANDREWS is *Computeractive*'s Mr Angry

In this issue Stuart Andrews is left speechless by...

Cortana

Don't tell my wife, but I've had a thing going with Cortana for over 13 years. I met her first of all playing the Xbox game Halo. She was the helpful artificial intelligence plot device that got me from A to B, blasting aliens as I went as the mighty space marine, the Master Chief. I've been meeting up with Cortana to blast more aliens every few years ever since, and we get along famously. She's always thoughtful, practical and full of good advice, and a surprisingly strong character given that, even within Halo's sci-fi world, she's just a big bunch of ones and zeroes.

> "I like the idea of a virtual assistant, but Cortana is less reliable than Manuel from *Fawlty Towers*"

A few years ago, Microsoft introduced a second Cortana. Cortana Mark II is the digital assistant on Windows Phones, and is one of the best things about Microsoft's much-maligned mobile operating system. This one sounds different – we don't get the original Cortana's voice here in the UK – but I can't complain. After all, it's not like *I* look or sound anything like Halo's Master Chief. Now I'm not a big one for talking to my phone, but when I have asked Cortana Mk II to nudge me with a reminder or help me get from A to B (without having to blast aliens), she's still a dab hand. This Cortana I like.

Now, however, there's a new Cortana on the block, and I can't really say I'm keen on her at all. I'm talking, of course, about the Windows 10 Cortana. What was once a straightforward search function has now evolved into a full-on digital assistant that busily locates relevant news stories and useful information, reminds you to do stuff, adds events in your calendar then tells you when they're about to happen. She can even dictate emails if you want. You don't? Me neither.

To be honest, I don't really get the point. Cortana's whole *raison d'être* is to act as a voice-enabled digital assistant. You say 'Hey Cortana' and her little window stands to attention, ready to be of service, at which point you say 'How do I get from Brockenhurst to Birmingham by train' or 'Remind me to do the school run at three-fifteen' and Cortana responds.

This kind of thing makes perfect sense when you're using a phone or even a tablet, where it can take take an age to get anything done prodding a cramped touchscreen. But on a PC or laptop, where I have a lovely big keyboard? I can do these things all by myself – and faster.

And, of course, not all PCs are set up for this. With my phone and tablet I can happily squawk into the built-in mic, but with my laptop I need to thrust my head up close and enunciate clearly. With my desktop PC? Forget it. There is no mic unless I plug my dictation headset in, and that kind of call-centre look is not for me.

My confident 'Hey Cortana' command only works every second or third time, ensuring that every effort to demonstrate to others how wonderful it is only serves to make me look like a buffoon. Yes, Microsoft's software is improving, but the names of places or people are frequently misheard, while instructions to email, add events or add reminders are met with silence, confusion and inaction. And when she tries to be proactive, helping me out with tips or suggestions, Cortana is pretty much hopeless. I like the idea of a virtual personal assistant, but this one's about as reliable as Manuel from *Fawlty Towers*.

Maybe one day, speaking to our computers as we would to a colleague or friend will be second nature to us, and the technology will be smart enough to second-guess what we want before we know we want it. For now, though, Cortana on a PC feels like a jumped-up search box with unrealistic aspirations.

Do you agree with Stuart?
Let us know at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue Stuart expresses his dislike of 'Like' buttons

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